10¢

MacIsaac's New Orleans Novelette

ARGOSY

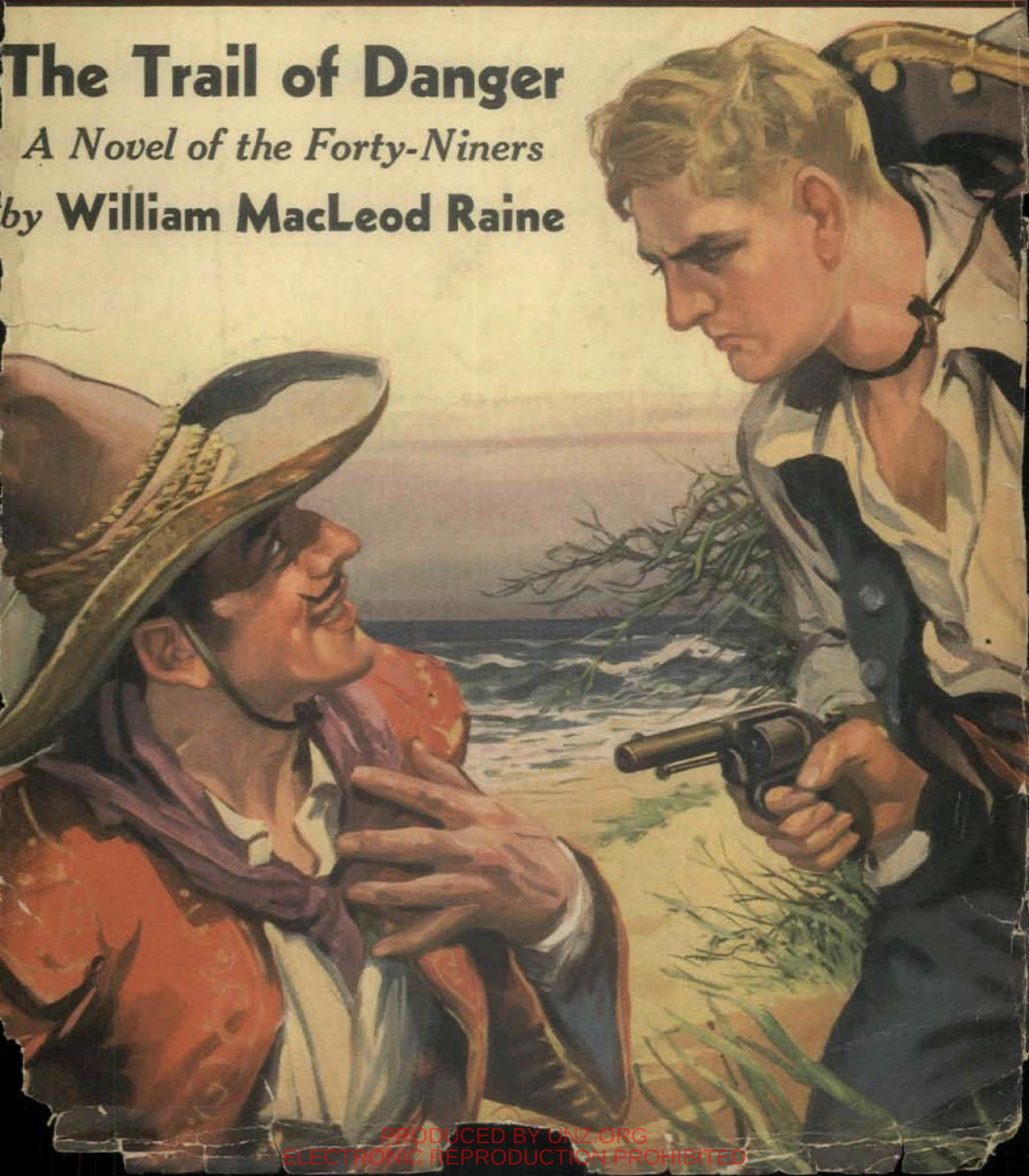
NRA

JUNE 23 1934 WEEKLY

The Trail of Danger

A Novel of the Forty-Niners

by **William MacLeod Raine**



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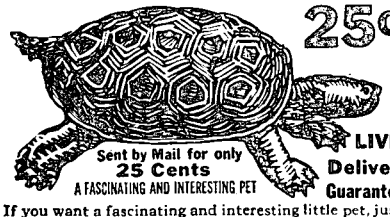

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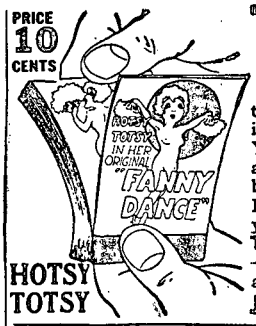

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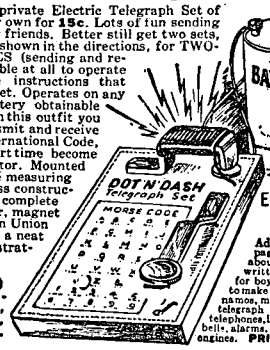

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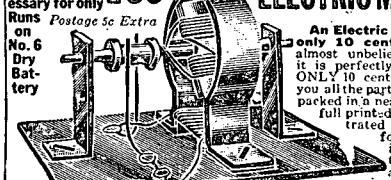

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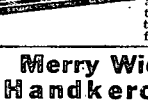

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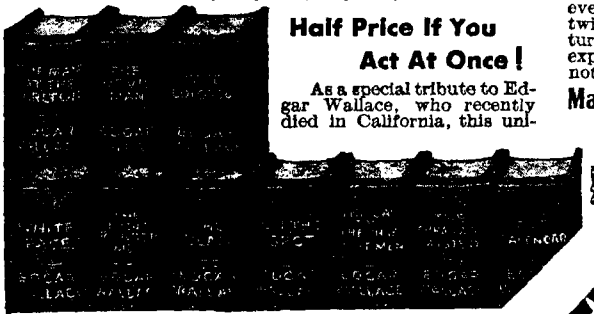

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Action Stories of Every Variety

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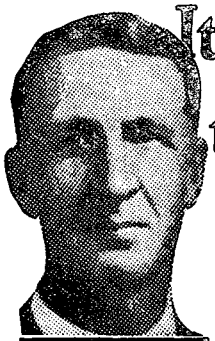

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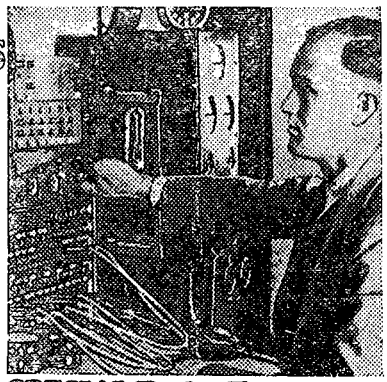

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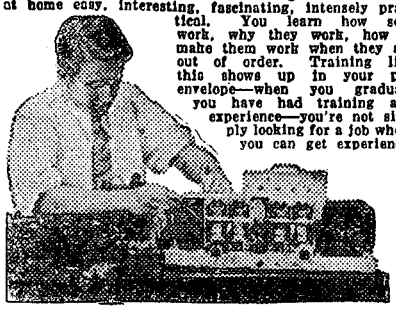

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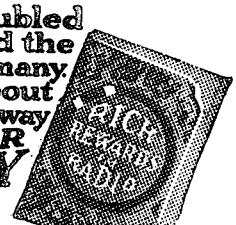

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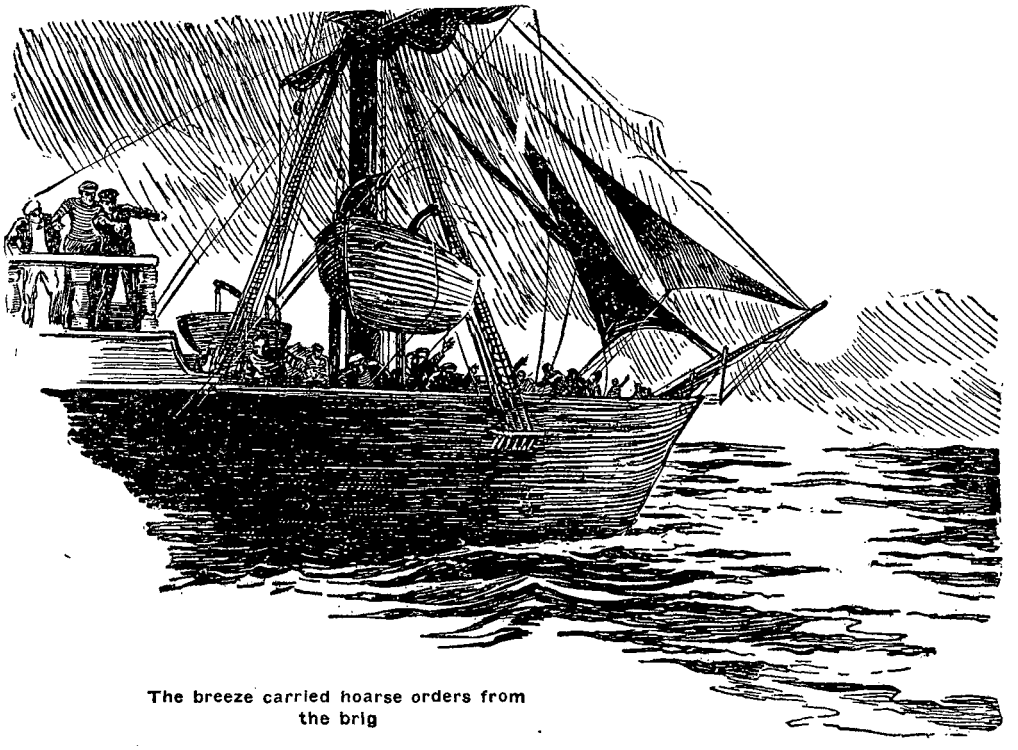
By WILLIAM MacLEOD RAINE

Author of "Luck," "King of the Bush," etc.



The breeze carried hoarse orders from the brig

Behind Dennis Gifford was the hell-ship that had shanghaied him—ahead were the new California gold fields

CHAPTER I.

THE RUNAWAY.

A BLOND boyish head was lifted cautiously above the hatchway. Blue eyes swept the moonlit deck in every direction. Against the ship's rail a man was leaning. Pungent tobacco smoke drifted back to Dennis Gifford. From the great bulk and heavy shoulders of the smoker the young sailor guessed he was Duff Conway, second mate of the brig Mary Bligh.

For Conway the lad had no love. The mate had shanghaied him at San Francisco a few weeks before, and since that time had ridden him hard. The fellow always preferred a blow to a word. The purple patch that surrounded one of Gifford's eyes was a reminder of the man's discipline.

At the turn of the tide the Mary Bligh would put to sea. If Dennis was going to escape, it had to be now. Dennis meant to swim for it. And Conway jeopardized his chances. Gifford's gaze turned shoreward to the

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stretch of surfbeaten sand. It was a long way and every foot of it he would be in the spotlight.

With another glance at the smoker, Dennis slipped aft. He was barefoot; his boots were tied around his neck. The rope which he had left near he fastened, then he lowered himself hand over hand.

The water was unexpectedly cold; and because of the possibility that his splashing might be heard, he could not yet warm himself by swimming. For Conway had now moved along the deck, and was leaning on the rail as he smoked. Apparently, he was looking across at the lights of Monterey.

The sailor lay still, expecting every moment to be discovered. Conway spat into the water, not ten feet from where the runaway was submerged, only his nose above the lapping waves. If the mate should take four steps toward the stern, he would probably see the end of the rope to which Dennis clung.

The mate had plenty of time. He smoked his pipe out and knocked the dottle against the rail. Even then he was in no hurry to move. To Dennis it seemed at least an hour before the man strolled leisurely away.

Then Gifford let go the rope and pushed with his feet against the side of the brig. He swam softly, with as little splashing as possible. A long shaft of moonlight lay in front of him. Any casual eye directed from the brig might focus on him. There were scudding clouds in the sky. He wished that some of them would drift between him and that shining circle in the heavens.

AFTER the first hundred yards he put more power into his strokes. His escape might at any moment be discovered. The Mary Bligh was no honest craft, but one engaged in nefarious trade. Between its walls were packed fear and hatred. Spying and treachery were natural concomitants.

Over his shoulder he saw men lowering a boat

Captain Little and his officers ruled with heavy hands. To be captured meant that Dennis would be triced up and flogged till the blood ran down his bare back. Twice he and a dozen other sailors had stood by and seen unhappy wretches shrieking from the pain of the cat. The furious resentment in the hearts of those watching had been repressed, for any expression of it would have been construed as mutiny.

A strong swimmer, Dennis made steady progress. Given time, he knew he could reach the shore.—That

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plaguey moon! If only it would not shine so brightly.

Across the waters there came to him from the ship a shout—excited voices. Over his shoulder he could see men running to and fro. They were lowering a boat. Hoarse orders carried on the breeze. Figures were dropping into the boat.

Duff Conway's brutal bellow swept across the waves to him: "Bite into it, my hearties! Lift her along! When I get the scut I'll ridge his back for him, I promise you."

The splash of the oars reached the swimmer. The boat was drawing near.

He went forward, hand over hand, grim despair in his heart. He was in the surf now—through big breakers. A foot touched bottom. He ran splashing through the water, breathing hard from the furious rush to get away from the punishment at his heels. When he reached the beach he turned without stopping.

Men were leaping from the boat. They splashed after him, with shouts and oaths.

In front of him were the lights of Alvarado Street, on his right the wharf. Beyond this loomed up the two-story custom house, which within a decade had flown the flags of Mexico, of California, and of the United States. He ran up the street ahead of him.

Conway's bull voice roared after him, "Runaway! Stop him!"

Out of a dance hall came two Californians. In those days any Spaniard or Mexican was called a Californian. One of the pair called to the other in Spanish. Instantly they acted, for there was a standing reward for returning runaway sailors to their ships.

The men separated to cut off the fugitive, and Dennis was trapped in a narrow street. With the sailors of the Mary Bligh at his heels he could not turn. He had to keep going.

One of the Californians in front ordered him to halt; he knew enough Spanish to understand that. Plunging straight at the man, he stopped abruptly, then dodged to the left, between the two.

In the moonlight he caught the flash of a knife and flung up an arm to avert the blade. A flame of fire ripped through the flesh of his forearm. But he was in the clear, and flying up Alvarado, with the chase pounding after him.

The lights of the street marked his course too plainly. He dived into a dark narrow lane, and from it doubled into another.

Over his shoulder he caught sight of Long Jim, the boatswain, close upon him.

The man clutched at him with a sweep of the arm, caught his coat, and deliberately let go. As Dennis turned another corner he looked back. Long Jim had stumbled and fallen; and the man behind him was crashing down on top of him.

Dennis was in a road on both sides of which were high adobe walls. A great pine tree rose in front of him, at one side of the street. Up the trunk he swarmed, caught at the lowest branch, moved swiftly along it to the wall, and dropped down on the other side.

His feet struck the soft loam as the pursuit went full cry up the road. He listened.

Had he been seen shinning up the pine?

Presently he heard some one call to a runner hurrying past.

"What's your hurry, Jock? Let Conway catch his own runaways, damn his cruel soul to hell!"

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The fugitive recognized the voice of Long Jim.

The second man stopped.

"Right you are, mate. I'm no crimp's bloodhound. I'll not run my legs off for that sea wolf.—Got any 'baccy, Jim?"

They lit their pipes and moved away.

YOUNG GIFFORD saw that he was in an old fashioned walled garden in which grew sweet peas, hollyhocks, roses and white lilies. Near him splashed a fountain. There were walks between the flower beds, and near the center of the garden, under a cypress tree, seats and a table. The shadowy back of a large house completed the rectangle. All of its windows were dark.

Dennis sat on a bench to put on his boots. His feet were stone-bruised, but that did not matter.

He took off his coat to examine the slash in his arm. Fortunately, the knife had not ripped deeply. The wound had bled a good deal, but a handkerchief would stop that.

His heart gave a jump. The fingers of two hands covered his eyes. He heard a soft, gay ripple of laughter, a caressing murmur of liquid Spanish. Before he could move or speak, the hands tilted back his head and a warm cheek nestled against his.

Dennis leaped to his feet. With a cry of dismay a woman started back. She had discovered that he was the wrong man.

"Who are you?" she demanded in her own language.

He could see the panic in her lustrous dark eyes. She was young—a mere girl. Though afraid, she kept her voice down. It was clear she had no wish to arouse the sleeping house.

"I'm a runaway sailor," he explained. "They were following me, and I climbed over the garden wall to hide."

The girl had a supple, slender body. She wore a chemise with short embroidered sleeves trimmed with lace, a muslin petticoat flounced with scarlet, shoes of blue satin, and a silk shawl over her head. Shining black hair, in heavy plaits, hung down her back far below the waist.

She gave a soft little cry. "*Madre de Dios!*—Your arm!"

"A man gashed it with a knife while I was escaping," he said.

Her gaze passed over him, took in his wet clothes, his clear-eyed, lean-flanked youth. He was a boy, she thought—a nice boy—and his sudden smile was naïve and reassuring.

"Have you a—a kerchief?" she asked in halting English.

He had not. She used her own to bind the wound. The touch of her fingers, the nearness of her perfumed hair, thrilled his pulses.

He had never before been ministered to by a gracious and beautiful young *señorita.*

"Now you must go," she said when she had finished. "Quickly!—And forget that you have ever been here."

"*Muchas gracias, señorita,*" he said in the soft liquid vowels of her own Spanish. "At your feet.—I shall never forget your kindness."

From the top of the wall a soft voice spoke derisively:

"All cats are gray in the dark. One lover does as well as another. Is it not so, *carina?*"

Then a light figure dropped into the garden and moved forward. It carried itself with a negligent grace.

"Señor Bandini!" the girl cried.

His dark eyes were fixed on the

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sailor. In them burned a flame of jealousy that held an imminent threat.

"You have, it seems, other friends who get favors. I regret that I arrived too soon—or too late. My memory is so bad. I forget the hour, perhaps, and I interrupt."

"He is not my friend.—He is a poor man in trouble, whom we must help. A seaman from a ship in the harbor—"

"Ah! A sailor with a sweetheart in every port. I have heard of them."

The girl drew up her slight figure to haughty dignity. "Is it necessary that you insult me, *señor?*"

THE newcomer was a caballero, gay with silver and gold and girt with a crimson sash from beneath which the handle of a long knife and the butt of a revolver showed. He had black curling hair, an olive skin of remarkable texture, and delicate features which might have been effeminate but for the bold and brilliant eyes. Gifford thought he had never seen a handsomer man—nor one more sinister.

"Do I insult you, *mi muy querida?*" the Californian asked, his voice a soft yet savage purr. "Do my eyes lie to me when they tell me a stranger is here?"

"A stranger is here. Yes. But you do not ask how he came."

"I do not even ask how and where he will go," Bandini said, and his white teeth flashed in a smile that held no friendliness.

Dennis spoke. "I'm a runaway sailor—from the brig Mary Bligh. Shanghaied at San Francisco and held a prisoner on board. To-night I slipped overboard, was seen, and pursued. To escape, I climbed the tree outside and dropped into the garden."

"Where you found beauty waiting for you—with a kerchief to bind on the knight's arm," Bandini jeered. "You are lucky, Mr. Yankee.—Yet I am not so sure. I ask myself a question. Is it lucky to be too lucky—for a short time?"

The girl stamped her foot, anger sparkling in her big eyes.

"Are you a fool?—Do you not see he is wounded? And that he is a sailor, as he says? See! He is wet. He swam from his ship, as others do." Her anger died. "I do not understand you, Señor Bandini. I thought—you told me—that—"

He broke in swiftly, in Spanish.

"And it is true! I love you.—No man shall come between us. None. I, Juan Cas—Bandini, swear it. You are mine. I would strike a knife in the heart of one who interferes."

She heard him with distress. Was this the cavalier who was so filled with passionate ardor, but was so gentle and protective toward her?

"This man is nothing to me—nothing!" she insisted. "I never met him before."

"Yet you, Rosita Martinez, of the best blood in Spain, degrade yourself by tying up the wound of a dirty Yankee sailor—a runaway who will be dragged back to taste the whip."

Beneath the girl's olive skin ran a flush of shame.

"You do well to remind me, Juan Bandini, that I have forgotten I am a Martinez. Else why would I be waiting here for you? I am a wicked girl, who has come out alone in the night to see a man? You are right, I degrade myself. I will go back to the house and tell my mother—and be well whipped, as I deserve."

Rosita turned impulsively, but Bandini was in front of her before she could move.

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His smile had become a thing of evil —a menace which chilled her heart.

"One moment, *carissima!*—Since this man is nothing to you, it will be no concern of yours that I am going to blow his brains out, here beneath the cypress.—Happy dreams, Rosita!"

He stood aside, and bowed raffishly.

The girl stopped, all her outraged dignity banished. In her great dark eyes fear fluttered.

"You cannot mean that, Juan. He has done nothing to you—no harm. He is but a poor man, trying to escape.—You do not believe me. Why?"

"But I believe you," the Californian replied. "For I saw your friend before—on Alvarado Street, not twenty minutes since. He was a young man in a hurry; but after all, he was not quite quick enough. For it was my knife that ripped his arm while he was running."

"You did it?" she cried. "But why?"

"I do not like these Americans! They come here to rob us of our country. Everywhere they are swarming. So I am glad to send one back to his ship to be beaten.—*Viva California!* Down with the *Gringoes!*"

Rosita looked at Bandini with startled eyes. This man was a stranger to her; he was not the gay young caballero who had taken her girlish fancy. For a moment she caught a glimpse of something dark and sinister in him, something that almost frightened her.

"That is true. But this boy is not to blame.—Be generous to him, Juan! Do not do this dreadful thing you threaten."

The girl put a hand pleadingly on his arm. "But I know you jest because you are angry with me. Tell me that you will not harm him."

The Californian smiled maliciously. "I will not harm him, Rosita, since you beg for him. But this is a dangerous coast for a boy as innocent as you say this one is. There are Indians and *banditti* here. I will see him back to his ship, where he will be safe."

Her face was filled with entreaty.

"But he does not want to go back to his ship, Juan. He has run away from it. Did you not hear him say so?"

"I heard him say so. But he has changed his mind."

Bandini turned to Gifford and showed his fine ivory teeth in a hateful, flashing smile.

"Is it not so, *señor?* You wish to be safe from the dangers of this wild California. Your heart longs for the deck of this ship of yours.—If I am wrong you will correct me, will you not?"

THE sailor understood that he was being offered an option. This man would either shoot him down as soon as the girl had gone into the house, or he would take him back to the Mary Bligh and collect a reward for the runaway's return.

The American might take his choice.

It was hard to believe that this Mexican meant murder, for there seemed to be no adequate reason for it. But Dennis knew that it was true that Joaquin Murietta and scores of other bandits were roaming over California intent on wiping out as many Americans as possible. They had persuaded themselves that it was a patriotic duty to destroy the foreigners who were taking over the country so rapidly. Bandini might hold the same viewpoint.

Dennis grinned. He might as well make the best of it for the moment,

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though he had no intention of being taken back to the brig.

"Yes, I've changed my mind.—A life on the ocean wave for me, Señor Bandini. I'll feel safer when I get back to the Mary Bligh."

"Ah! You hear, Rosita.—Was I not right? I give you my word, I will take him back like a little lamb to the fold."

Rosita was disturbed. She did not want this American returned to the ship where he had been so unhappy. That Juan was jealous she understood. Yet in a sense, this sailor had made appeal to her hospitality and to her chivalry. It would be intolerable to desert him, to let him be taken back to his ship for a reward. That would be the same as selling him.

"But he does not mean it, Señor Bandini," she protested. "Do you not see? He is afraid of you—of what you mean to do to him. That is absurd. You are a Spanish caballero. Is it not so?"

The pleading voice of the girl broke as she lifted her big velvety eyes in supplication to the Californian.

"He does not know that you are just teasing me, that you cannot harm one who has thrown himself upon our protection or turn him over to his foes for money," she added.

"Did he throw himself on my protection?" Bandini asked sulkily. "I do not think so."

"On mine. Is it not the same? If you are my—my friend—as you say you are—"

She drew herself up with a certain proud disdain; for her own conduct certainly, and perhaps for his, too. "I came into the garden to meet—a gentleman—who—who had begged me for a few minutes alone. I was a bad girl; it was wicked of me to come. But I am punished.—Why did I think I knew so much better than my mother who has taught me what is right?"

"Have I said I do not understand?" Bandini demanded in a surly way.

"You have been saying it, one way and another, ever since you came."

In the look she gave him was dismayed helplessness. She had thought she knew what manner of man he was, and she had found that she did not know at all.

Dennis caught in Bandini's eyes, which were as treacherous as those of a cat, a tigerish ferocity that gleamed for a moment and was gone.

The man bowed to the girl.

"I will not take this Yankee dog back to his ship, since you do not wish it, *ninita*. Your desire is law to me.—Are you content?"

Her troubled eyes were still full of doubt, but she told him that she was satisfied.

To Dennis she turned timidly, with a word.

"I hope your wound will not trouble you long, *señor*."

The Californian answered for him, his white teeth gleaming again in a swift smile.

"I am sure it will not, *carissima*. For it I have a certain specific."

His strange smile left her still uncertain.

"You will take care of him, I know," she murmured.

"Do I lose my little hour with you?" Bandini asked in a low voice.

"It must be so—for to-night. I must hurry back to the house."

He glowered, sulkily.

"And to-morrow night?"

"Perhaps," she said. "I do not know yet.—*Adios, amigo*."

He caught her hand and raised it to his lips. She turned and ran, gathering

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up her skirts that they might not impede her as she flew to the house.

CHAPTER II.

SHOTS IN THE NIGHT.

DENNIS GIFFORD knew that not for an instant had the Californian been unaware of him during the talk with Rosita Martinez. He could not have made a move to escape or to attack without having had bullets flung into his body. The man was watching him warily.

As the girl disappeared, Bandini turned on him, almost with the pounce of a panther. The Californian had lost ground with Rosita, and obviously he needed all her favor to overcome his handicaps. He was a stranger, a man unknown to her family, and he could show no credentials that would justify him in aspiring to her hand. His only hope lay in the romantic appeal he made. And the intrusion of this sailor had shaken his position with her.

"So, dog of an American, you interfere!" he cried angrily. "You win the lady's pity! She is all tender heart for you.—I am to do this, and I am not to do that.—Bah! *Ciertamente!* Am I a fool?—I, the famous Juan Castro, known from the northern border of Alta California to the farthest fringe of Baja California? No, I will not take you back to your ship. But I will take you to Point Lobos, where there is a precipice and many sharp rocks below, and a tide that will sweep all that is left of you far out to sea."

A chill wind swept over Dennis. This man was Juan Castro, then, the infamous bandit, the murderous raider of mining camps, and the killer of many Americans. Upon his head was a purse of five thousand dollars, dead or alive. That the man had doomed him he had no doubt. It was notorious that Castro hated Americans. How much more would he dislike one who had spoiled his rendezvous and made a rift between him and the lady he fancied?

Young though he was, Dennis had lived a life crowded with adventure. If he was to escape, it must be by the cool use of his brains. The fellow had unconsciously given him one lead. Vanity stood out in him like a bandaged thumb; and it was a weakness to be made the most of until a better opening offered.

"The great Juan Castro?" Gifford repeated, his voice awe-struck. "But why do you say 'Known to the boundaries of California,' when one hears of Castro far back in the cities of my country, and at campfires on the trail, and in ships beating round the Horn? I have heard of Joaquin Murietta too—but far, far more of Juan Castro."

"Murietta is an upstart," the outlaw said sharply, resentment in his voice. "I raid the Yankee camps, and everybody cries, 'Murietta at work again.'—Bah! He is nothing."

"It is strange that I have met you so soon. The governor—the *alcalde*—any one can meet them. But Castro himself—that is different. I am in luck!"

"*Bad* luck," the Californian amended grimly, though he sunned himself, none the less, in the naïve admiration of this *gringo*.

"Perhaps. I do not know. It is surprising that you who are so young have done so much. I expected an older man—middle-aged."

"Before I am through I shall sweep the Americanos out of California. You will not live to see it, yet it is so."

The Mexican made this prediction

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with fatuous complacency. Americans were pouring into California by thousands, across the plains, by way of the Isthmus and in ships up from the Horn. But many of the natives still cherished the hope that their country would yet be redeemed from the plague of foreigners. And the bandits recruited their companies largely through the patriotic appeal.

"Perhaps—" Dennis said.

"It is time to be off.—Up the wall. And when you reach the top, do not move unless you want a bullet through you."

GIFFORD found footholds in the adobe brick, and by means of them reached the top. He was ordered to leave his legs dangling until Castro had joined him. A moment or two later the bandit also was astride the wall.

"I shall go down first, and my eyes will be on you all the time," he told his prisoner.

"Yes," said the sailor meekly.

Castro jumped lightly to the ground without the aid of the tree. An instant later, almost before his feet had landed, Dennis too was on his way down. But it was on the garden side of the wall.

A harmless bullet flew skyward at him.

Dennis ran toward the dark house, raising his voice in a shout.

"Castro is here! Juan Castro, the bandit.—Open the door, for the love of Heaven!"

What followed happened much more swiftly than it can be told. A bullet struck the side of the house, close to Dennis. Another splintered through the door upon which he was hammering. A third flung a spurt of dirt from the ground. From the top of the wall Castro fired until his revolver was empty.

Then the door opened. A voice cried in Spanish: "Who is there?"

Dennis stepped inside and closed the door. He had recognized that frightened voice.

"It is I, *señorita.*—Dennis Gifford, the American sailor. Your Señor Bandini is Juan Castro, the bandit. He is trying to kill me!"

In the darkness he heard Rosita gasp. "Juan Castro, the bandit?—*No, es imposible!*"

But he knew that the shock of what he had said had struck home.

THERE were noises in the house. Some one called: "Pedro, what is the disturbance?"

A man with a candle appeared at the end of a passage.

Rosita murmured, "My father!—What shall I do?"

"Leave it to me," Dennis told her in a low tone, and almost without a break he continued in a louder voice, "I am desolated to disturb you, *señora,* but I am a hunted man.—I beg of you shelter and refuge."

The man with the candle moved forward. He wore a poncho over his night clothes.

"What is all this noise and shooting?" he demanded. Then, sharply, "Rosita, why are you here?"

"I heard shots and cries," the girl explained. "Some one begged to be admitted. I opened the door—and then you came. Did I do wrong, my father?"

"Who are you?" Ramon Martinez asked the young man imperiously. "Why do you come knocking at my house in the night?"

Already other men, and a middle-aged but still handsome woman, had

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appeared in the hall. Dennis gave his whole attention to Rosita's father. He stood six feet in height, straight as an arrow, broad-shouldered and strong. Even in his scanty attire, he contrived to look dignified. The cast of his face was noble and aristocratic.

"*Señor,* I am a runaway sailor from the brig Mary Bligh, now in the harbor. I was shanghaied by ruffians, and I have been treated worse than a dog. To-night I escaped by swimming; but the pursuit was at my heels. I ran up this street, climbed the wall of your garden and hid there. My enemies followed me, and they shot at me. To save myself I cried for help and I beat upon your door.—Since you are a great Spanish caballero, you will not refuse me aid."

Dennis made his plea with quiet assurance.

Martinez spoke to his daughter in Spanish, telling her to go to bed at once. To the uninvited guest he said, "If your story is true, you need not be afraid. My house is yours, *señor.*"

Rosita was already vanishing down a corridor.

The older woman, the girl's mother, came forward. A large shawl draped her as completely as a dress. To a servant she said:

"Manuel, tell Augusta to make ready the west bedroom." To the stranger, "I make you welcome to our house, *señor.*"

Doña Maria Martinez was a handsome woman in her early forties; tall and dignified, but with a face full of kindness.

Before showing Dennis to his room, Martinez offered the young man a glass of wine. The Californian had noted that his guest was pale, but he did not know that it was from loss of blood. Nor did the American tell him; for if he took his coat off and showed the wound, his host would find bound over it his daughter's handkerchief.

CHAPTER III.

AN HONORED GUEST.

FORTUNATELY, Rosita had had time to change back into her night attire before the young American had raised his shout for help. It had been necessary only to fling a cloak over the white gown, and to fly down to his rescue. Thus the suspicions of her parents had not been aroused.

But Rosita was in a most unhappy frame of mind. The wives and daughters of Californians were chaste and decorous. It was not proper for an unmarried girl to see a man alone, even when she was engaged to him. And she had flung aside all the teachings of a lifetime, all the traditions of her race and caste.—Why? Why?—Because a man had kindled in her a flame of romantic passion.

She had met this scion of the Bandini family—direct, he said, from Guadalajara—at a *baile* where she had been taken with her sisters by her mother. He had contrived to throw about himself an air of tantalizing mystery, and her inflammable heart had warmed to him at once.

The swiftness of her response to his advances had frightened even her. When, behind a great palm, he had kissed her passionately, she had given herself without denial to his lips. When he had begged for a few minutes alone with her in the garden, she had reluctantly assented—and now she knew that her wicked embrace had been for the wrong man. She could

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not now understand what had driven her to such lengths. And if what this runaway sailor had said was true, Bandini was nothing but a murderous bandit; an outlaw with a price on his head, to be shot down like a mad dog.

She realized now that she had taken it for granted that Juan Bandini was telling the truth, when he dropped hints about the magnificence of the family estates in Spain. Because he had stirred her imagination, she had been eager to believe that he was all that was splendid and fine.

Now she knew she had been deceived. She had known it from that moment under the cypress when evil had distorted his face and leaped like a wild beast out of his eyes. Something base and horrible in him had let itself be seen, and it had made her sick.

Very likely the American was right; Bandini was Juan Castro. She shuddered to think what a danger she had escaped, and a profound humiliation depressed her.

Good girls did not do what she had done.

If Doña Maria knew what she had done she would be soundly whipped, and locked in her room for a week, with nothing to eat but *tortillas* and *frijoles,* and afterward she would be watched with suspicion. That was what she deserved, of course, and it was what she would get, if the young American sailor let out one syllable too much.

But Dennis had no intention of betraying her secret. The wound in his arm was painful. He wanted to have better care taken of it than Rosita had been able to give in her haste, yet he did not once mention it, lest the girl's handkerchief be discovered.

He was conducted to a bedroom furnished in plain mahogany that had been bought from a trading ship. On the wall was a picture of the Virgin and Child. No carpet covered the floor. But the bed was elaborate with lace and silk spreads, embroidered with fine drawn work.

A small pile of silver on a table warmed his heart. He knew that it was "guest money," to be used by him after he left. His host was too tactful to suggest that he might be out of funds. The silver was there for him to take if he needed it.

The pain in his arm kept him awake for a time, but after an hour or so he fell into troubled sleep, during which he dreamed that Rosita and he were pursued by ruffians always on the verge of capturing them.

THE rays of the early sun streaming through the deeply recessed window awakened him. Sounds of activity in the house came to him. He rose, washed his wound and bound it with a strip torn from his blouse, made himself presentable, and dressed.

A servant who said his name was Pedro led him to breakfast. The family was about to sit down. Martinez made the introductions simple.

"Señora Martinez you have already met. I introduce my sons, *señor*—Guillermo, Antonio, Ramon, Ygnacio, and Vicente—my daughters, Maria, Luisa, Rosita, and Natividad. My children, this is Señor Geefford."

The young people remained standing until their parents were seated and gave them the signal to sit down. Dennis had never seen such a family. All of them looked alike, yet each was an individual. They ranged in age from about twenty-three to thirteen. The sons were all black-haired, slender, sinuous and graceful; the daughters were

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brunettes, amazingly good-looking, with soft eyes and modest retiring manners. The girls all had claims to beauty, but Dennis thought Rosita the pick.

Breakfast consisted of chocolate, broiled meat with rich gravy, and *tortillas*. The family life was a little formal, but it was plain to the guest that affection and good feeling abounded. There were sly jokes and gentle repartee, in which the younger ones took little part.

After breakfast Ramon and his wife smoked cigarettes; but none of the sons joined them, for it was a point of etiquette that they should not smoke in the presence of their parents.

The meal finished, Martinez led his guest to a small room which he used as an office. The Californian put on his head a black silk kerchief, the four corners of which were knotted back of his neck. He was dressed in elaborate and colorful fashion. He belonged to the old school, and though many of his friends were taking on a modified form of the American dress, Don Ramon preferred to stick to that of a Spanish caballero. On occasion, he even had a sword hanging by his side.

Now he chose a gold-headed cane, one that had been the symbol of authority in the days when he had been Monterey's *alcalde*.

"Let us go into the garden," he suggested.

With much tact, he then led the young man into a discussion of his prospects.

Gifford said frankly he had none. Probably he would go to the Sacramento gold fields and try his luck there.

"You came to California to seek your fortune in the diggings?" the older man asked.

"To seek my fortune. I had the diggings in mind, but I am not sure now that the best opportunities are there. When I was shanghaied I had entered into a partnership with two other young men, one of whom I knew in the East.

"We expected to set out for the gold fields and we had bought an outfit. I put five hundred dollars into my share of it, but I suppose that has been lost long since. That was three months ago. Events move fast in San Francisco, and they are probably broke now. I dare say they have become discouraged and gone home. Anyhow, my investment has gone.

"And so I might as well go north, where work can be had in plenty. But I must be careful not to get caught again by the crimps who took me before."

"Your ship left the harbor last night for San Diego," said Don Ramon. "You are safe from being taken back. Nobody will annoy you now. That is, if you slip away from here quietly."

Dennis was not so certain of that. He had made an enemy in the garden last night; one who would stop at nothing. However, he did not say so. He conveyed to his host some information which it seemed his host ought to have.

"One of the men who joined the crimps in hunting me was a man who calls himself Juan Bandini, but I heard him b o a s t that that is not his real name. From what he said, I gather that he has social entrée in Monterey. He laughed at those he has fooled.—His real name is Juan Castro. He claims that as a bandit he is known from one end of California to another."

"Madre de Dios!" cried Martinez in

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excitement. "Can this be true?—Why, the scoundrel even danced with one of my daughters!"

The young man knew that he had said enough. It was possible that Bandini had lied; that he was not Castro at all. But Dennis did not think so. The fellow's jealousy of Murietta had seemed too genuine to doubt. In any case, Ramon Martinez would see to it that Bandini's social career in Monterey was closed, unless the man could show unimpeachable references.

"This Castro is a cold-blooded murderer, the head of a band of ruffians who ride to and fro on plundering raids," the Californian went on. "He talks patriotism—California for the Californians; death to the Yankees who are stealing our beautiful country. But such talk is only an excuse for his crimes. He is a villain, and he should be shot down like a wolf.—As for this Bandini, I never liked him. There is something about him—I don't quite know what. He has never been inside my house, but I shall take steps to see that he is not allowed to come to a *baile* again. Unless he can explain.—If possible, I shall have him arrested."

"He is a dangerous man," Dennis warned.

"Perhaps." Martinez lifted his hands in a gesture of helplessness. "In the old days this country was a paradise. We had no theft—or very little—and no murder. Everybody was contented, even the poor. Nobody had money, but nobody was hungry. Then gold is discovered. Yerba Buena becomes a great city called San Francisco, and it is filled with crime and vice.

"One hears of nothing but gold—gold—gold. *Por Dios!* I think gold must be the mother of evil. In that city alone there have been, I am told, twelve hundred murders committed already; yet only one scoundrel has paid for his wrong-doing.

"My own people used to be gentle and kindly, and most of them still are so. But hundreds have now joined Murietta and Castro and the other leaders of *banditti*.—What is to be the end, my friend? Are the good old days to vanish forever?"

Dennis knew this was a true indictment; the coming of the Americans had brought a train of evils to this simple pastoral country. To the gold fields there had come from the States many parasites to prey upon the miners—gamblers, bummers, gunmen and ladies of leisure. Many convicts and ex-convicts from Australia, known as Sydney ducks, swelled the number of undesirables. And native Californians operated as *banditti* in the country, in the small towns, and in the mining camps.

A strange crisis in morals had developed, due perhaps to a clash of races and ideas, against a background filled with the temptation of quick wealth to be acquired by lawless practices. Men of previously good reputation joined hands with criminals.

From this carnival of crime induced by the lust for gold the old caballeros of the ranches stood aloof. They remained, as they always had been, honorable gentlemen whose word counted for as much as a bond. But already they were becoming the victims of the sharp bargaining of the new era; their strange combination of vices and virtues was rapidly stripping them of their lands and their cattle.

Martinez smiled, shrugging aside his misgivings.

"But, *amigo mio*, it is of your affairs that we must talk," he said. "A

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complaint has been lodged against me for harboring a runaway sailor. So quickly! With your permission, I shall send you to one of my *haciendas,* the Rancho San Pablo, where my *majordomo* will give you employment until such time as you wish to leave. Or, if you prefer, you may stay there as my guest. For here in Monterey the custom-house officials may make trouble for you. If you are not here, the matter will most likely be dropped."

"YOU are too good to me, *señor!*" Dennis said earnestly. "I have no claim on you. I am only a runaway deckhand, yet you treat me like an honored guest."

"Every guest of my house is an honored guest," the Californian said, with simple, proud dignity.

"Then I gladly accept your offer of employment, for the present, until I can decide what is best to do. My deepest thanks, *señor!*"

And so it was arranged that Gifford should not set out for the *rancho* until after dark, and that one of the Martinez lads should guide him there.

During the day he caught glimpses of Doña Maria and the young ladies, now and again. Once he passed a room where they were busy doing embroidery work, and again he saw them cutting roses in the garden.

Late in the afternoon, from behind the lace curtains of his window, he saw the girls in the garden again. One of them was playing a guitar, and another was dancing. There was much gayety and laughter. Presently Rosita was called on to join her sister Luisa in the *jarabe.*

Both of them were lovely in their dusky, vivid youth, so eagerly and passionately alive; but Dennis watched Rosita chiefly. He thought he had never seen such grace. She was slender and arrow-straight, like a dancing spirit or a daughter of the dawn.

Abruptly he turned from the window. This dance was not meant for him. He had no right to watch it...

LATE in the afternoon a maid came to his room, ostensibly to fill his water carafe. Into his hand she unexpectedly thrust a slip of folded paper, and upon it was written a single word, "*Gracias.*"

There was no signature, but the message needed none.

Dennis hoped he might get a chance to say a few words to Rosita alone. He felt that very likely it was unnecessary to warn her against Bandini; but he could not be sure that she entirely believed that the man was Castro. She might be persuaded to give him another hearing if he denied convincingly enough that he was the outlaw.

He did not, however, get a chance to see her, either in private or public—unless the eyes that looked down on him from a lattice as he walked across the patio to say good-bye to his host and hostess belonged to Rosita and not to one of her sisters.

Dennis Gifford was a good-looking young man, and Doña Maria believed him to be an honest one. As she parted with him, she said she hoped God and the saints would lead him safely by the hand.

A momentary mist of tears blinded him. They had been so good to him, these gentle Californians—for no reason at all that he could see, except out of their native kindness of heart.

"I would like to tell you, Doña Maria," he said impulsively, "that I come of a good Maryland family which has lived on the same place since Colonial days."

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"I do not doubt it," she replied, smiling at him. "I use my eyes. I see that you are well taught."

"My grandfather was an officer in the Revolutionary War; my father was a colonel in the War of 1812, though he was a very young man at the time. I want you to know that your hospitality is not wasted on a scalawag."

"But we are already sure of that," Ramon Martinez said simply.

Antonio had been deputed by his father to take Dennis to the *rancho*. Scudding clouds raced in front of the moon, most of the time; and this was just as well, Dennis felt. There was a chance that Juan Castro might be lurking in the vicinity, and the darker the night the better.

They slipped out of a back gate and followed a path for a hundred yards. Here they found a peon with two saddled horses.

CHAPTER IV.

FELIPE MAKES HIS BOW.

ANTONIO had something on his mind, and before they had ridden half a mile he plumped at it. "My sister Rosita wishes me to thank you, *señor,* for not betraying her secret to our parents," he said. "She was very foolish, but she is really a very good girl."

"I'm sure of it," Dennis said at once.

"She did wrong in going out to the garden to meet Juan Bandini. He persuaded her against her judgment. It will not occur again."

"You know all about what took place, then?"

"Yes. Rosita and I are very close. She went to meet this young man, and you were there instead. Then he came, too."

"Bandini told me that he is Juan Castro, the bandit. He it was who fired at me while I hammered on your door. The fellow will stick at nothing.—I believe your sister is in danger unless you watch her closely. I am troubled."

Antonio drew up his slender figure. "He would not dare lift a hand to a daughter of the house of Martinez," he said proudly. "If he did, we would shoot him down like a wolf."

"True enough—if you could find him. But isn't it true, too, that his life is forfeit a dozen times? If they could get at him, a hundred men would shoot him down. He might think that since he is already condemned another count against him would not matter."

"It would matter if he touched my sister!" the young Californian said, stiffly. "He will not stay in Monterey, if he has not already gone. My father will drive him out or land him in the *cuartel.*"

They could hear the distant murmur of the sea. It followed them up the long hill they were climbing and mingled with the sough of the Monterey pines. The night was as peaceful as old age.

They rounded a bend in the trail. A buck with branching antlers stood in the path, not fifty feet distant, its shiny eyes staring at them. A moment later the deer went crashing through the underbrush.

A fog began to roll up from the ocean, growing heavier every minute. Though the two young men rode close, their eyes made each other out only as vague vanishing shadows.

From the fog a voice sounded, ghost-like.

Instantly the riders halted. They

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listened; heard a murmur of words and the jingle of a bit. Men were approaching.

Antonio caught Gifford's horse by the bridle and led the way from the path into the brush. A rockrim barred progress. The two men stopped. The sounds of travelers moving through the pass came to them—the hoof of a horse striking a stone, the scraping of a *tapadera* against brush, an exasperated voice raised in irritation:

"*Carramba!* This fog was spewed from hell!"

In another moment or two, the hidden men would have been safe, but the roan which Dennis was riding betrayed them. The American saw what was coming, in time to know what that lift of the head meant, but not in time to prevent it. The horse nickered.

FROM the trail came a sharp summons, "*Quien es?*"

Neither of the men answered. In Spanish a voice ordered them to come out of the brush.

Young Martinez and Gifford looked at each other.

"Better answer," the latter said.

"Who are you?—What do you want?" Antonio asked.

"Never mind who we are or what we want. Come out of there and let's have a look at you."

Dennis eased out of its holster the revolver which he had bought from Guillermo Martinez, a few hours earlier. To Antonio he said:

"You'd better surrender, for even if it's the Castro gang they won't hurt you."

"What about you?"

The voice of the Anglo-Saxon was cold and hard.

"If they want me, they can and get me."

"I stay with you," Antonio said quietly. "My father put you under my protection. He will expect me to see you reach the *rancho*."

"The chances are these men are but harmless travelers, but they may not be. I have no claim on you. My quarrel is not yours. Better go and find out who they are."

"We'll find out from here—soon," the Californian replied. "They're coming after us."

The sound of a twig snapping came to them. Some one was moving through the brush. In the fog a form took shape, vaguely.

"Until we know your business, you are near enough," Gifford warned harshly. "Both of us are armed."

"Wait a minute. I merely ask you who you are. Is there any harm in that?"

"No harm. We are riding to Salinas on business," the native answered. "Antonio Martinez and a friend. Now we ask who you are and why you molest us?"

Three other shadowy forms had appeared out of the white mist. One of these moved nearer to the first man.

"These are not the ones we have been posted to get, Felipe," the newcomer said. "Not if the boy speaks truth. We will take a better look, and then move on."

Dennis held his revolver against the hip, his forearm lifted.

"A cat may look at a king, but not too closely," he said grimly. "Do your looking, my friend, and move on. We are in a hurry."

THE man who had been called Felipe lounged forward. He was a raffish young Mexican, in clothes of many colors. A scar on one cheek showed where a knife had ripped

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its way from ear almost to mouth. He glanced at Antonio, but his eyes came to rest on the American.

They were smiling eyes, but none the less keen ones.

"My first look at a king," he said gayly, paying not the least attention to the revolver that menaced him. "My curiosity—you will pardon it, your majesty, if I ask the name—in order that my grandchildren may boast of it?"

His manner was full of ironic grace and deference.

"Gifford—if that means anything to you."

"Not much, since I am only a poor rider of the plains."

The laughter died out of the olive face. In its place was intentness.

"Oh-ho! We have met before, I think. When you were in even more of a hurry."

"Yes," Dennis said quietly. "And when it was in your mind to stop me, as it seems to be now."

He had recognized Felipe at once as the man who had been with Juan Castro when he had dodged past them on Alvarado Street.

"But this is a horse of another color, as you Yankees say," Felipe murmured, his eyes dancing. "As a law-abiding citizen, your majesty, I ask a question. I ask it of Felipe Pacheco. 'What is your duty?' I say to him.—'A runaway sailor!'—Ought I to take him back to his ship?"

"Which is now halfway to San Diego?" Dennis interpolated.

"But the *alcalde* — what you call mayor—has an order to hold you until the return of the ship."

"How many men have you here?"

"There are four of us."

"Not enough.—Antonio, by the way, is not in this."

"So? You are a lone wolf.—And you think four to one is not enough? You carry a high heart, King Geefford the First."

"I carry also a Colt's revolver—and I am an expert shot," Dennis said coolly. "To be sure, the luck might break against me. I might kill only three of you before you got me down.—I ask a question, too, Señor Felipe Pacheco. Is your attempt to capture me worth while? Ten dollars is ten dollars. But after all, you could not take it with you to hell, where the first little crook of my forefinger would send you so quickly."

"A good argument, if the conclusion is true."

"One which you will have to take on faith."

"There is another little matter. My friend Juan Bandini has a personal grievance against you. I think he would like to see you for a few minutes.—Just a friendly gossip.—You would perhaps like to take a *pasear* with us to meet him again."

Felipe showed his white teeth in a satiric grin.

"I think not," Gifford replied hardily. "Let him wait. He is a bungler. When he tried to sheathe a knife in my body he could not do it. Five or six times he sent bullets at me without a hit. Give him time to sharpen his knife and to practice shooting. I have known fifteen-year-old boys who could do better."

Felipe laughed.

"I will tell him, but he will not like it. He will swear to cut your heart out, and very likely he will do it. You do not know our little captain. Juan is a good shot—none better. It was dark when he sent his leaden messages at you. Next time—another story."

"You there, on the right—keep

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back!" Dennis warned. "If you slip forward one step more, I'll start the fireworks."

"Our cockerel crows loud, José," jeered Felipe. "I am wondering how deep his spurs bite."

"This man is my father's guest," Antonio cut in. "If you attack him, you attack me."

"*Brava!*" Felipe cried. "That is the spirit.—Go your way, both of you. To-night we have bigger fish on the fire. But I will carry King Geef-ford's message to Juan, and he will remember it. *Hasta la vista!*"

DENNIS did not answer. Eyes and mind were both busy watching Felipe and his companions. Was this farewell a trick to get him at a disadvantage?

Antonio bowed. "*Adios, señor,*" he said with dignity.

Felipe turned negligently away. As he vanished in the fog he sang, in a pleasant voice, with a refined Castilian accent, an old song. The words drifted back to the men he was leaving:

"*Adios, adios, para siempre—adios . . .*"

Antonio drew a deep breath of relief. "They've gone," he said.

"Looks like it," the American agreed.

"They're after the convoy from the custom-house. I heard that it was going north to-night—to my uncle Guillermo, in payment for cattle."

"Then we'll have to circle round them and get back to Monterey to warn the officers."

"Yes—if we can." Antonio added, "Perhaps the fog will hide us while we slip past."

They did not return to the path, but kept in the woods, well to the north. Antonio knew every foot of the ground, and he led the way as swiftly as he could, winding in and out among the pines as they descended toward the town.

For long they rode in silence, not knowing how near they might be to the enemy.

It was not until the roar of the surf below them was plain that Dennis made a comment.

"This Felipe is one of Castro's men?"

"His chief lieutenant."

"He talks and carries himself like a man of birth."

"He comes of a good family, and he was well educated. But he has always been in trouble, even from a boy, so wild and uncontrolled he is. When he was seventeen he killed two men in a gambling house. Forced to take to the hills, he has been a bandit ever since. Not even Juan Castro is more desperate than he."

Abruptly he drew up his horse. "Listen!"

To them there came the *clip-clop* of rapid hoofs. A Mexican dashed past at a gallop.

The two young men looked at each other.

"Juan Castro's messenger," Dennis guessed.

The other nodded.

"To tell him the gold shipment has started."

CHAPTER V.

THE BATTLE IN THE ROCKS.

THE custom-house was dark when Dennis and Antonio reached it. An old fisherman told them that a wagon escorted by six soldiers had left there not ten minutes earlier.

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The young men consulted hurriedly. It was decided that Antonio should ride up to the *Presidio* and get help from the commandant, while Dennis followed the convoy to warn of an impending attack.

"If we're lucky, we'll not only save the convoy, but smash Castro's gang," Gifford said. "Tell the officer in charge he'll have to stir his stumps. Time is everything. As soon as the wagon gets into the hills Castro will strike."

The bandit messenger had taken a short cut to his chief through the hills, but Dennis followed the road taken by the convoy. It led through sand dunes parallel to the shore of the bay, and after a half mile turned sharply to the right, directly away from the sea.

Beyond the turn the road forked. Dennis had been traveling at a canter, but he pulled up abruptly at the fork. Should he take the northern or the southern branch? He swung from the saddle and tried to decide by the tracks which way the wagon had gone, but the ground was stony and he could not be sure. At a venture he tried the left fork.

Presently he began to think he had chosen wrongly. The road stuck to the lowlands, and skirted the dunes. Moreover, it was fading out to a path. He turned and rode back, but before he struck the fork again he knew that he had wasted nearly half an hour.

The right branch soon began to wind up into the hills, and he kept his horse at a fast gait. If he could arrive in time, he could stop and perhaps turn back the convoy. Later, the reinforcements might ambush the ambushers.

Once he stopped for a moment to listen. He thought he heard the faint creaking of wheels in front of him, and at once he gave his horse the spur.

The crack of a rifle sounded. Before the echo had died away there was a volley.

A voice cried exultantly: "*Viva Castro!*"

Dennis heard other shouts and oaths; a scream, the stamping of horses. There were more shots. His galloping horse had carried him into the very thick of it.

The attack had been made while the wagon was in a narrow cut where it could not be turned. Horses and troopers were jammed together in a huddle. From the rocks above, the *banditti* were firing down upon the mass. The sergeant in charge, a veteran, was swearing a vitriolic streak as he tried to hold his men and their mounts steady. One of the soldiers was leaning laxly against a wagon wheel. He had evidently been hit. The left wheel horse was down, and the other animals were kicking wildly in harness.

"Help's coming," Dennis shouted to the sergeant. "You can't stay here. We'd better charge this rock slope to the left."

The sergeant glanced at him. The non-commissioned officer did not ask him who he was or whence he came.

The advice was good. If they stayed huddled here the outlaws would shoot them down to the last man, as the sergeant had seen buffalo hunters do with a milling herd. He knew, too, that in another moment his men would break and run for it, in which case it would be devil take the hindmost.

"This way!" he yelled. "Up the hill here!—Come on!"

The sergeant swung from his horse and made for the rocks, Dennis at his heels. One of the troopers turned and bolted through the cut, in the direction from which they had come; the others dismounted and swarmed up the stiff rocky hill.

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Dennis heard the whine of bullets as he clambered up, but he knew that in this fog the shooting must be wild. A flash came from the bowlders just above him. Dennis did not stop. Safety lay in getting to that rockrim as soon as possible. He did not even take time to return the fire.

OUT of the rocks a man scrambled hurriedly, with a startled Spanish oath. In his last rush upward Dennis caromed into the outlaw. The man turned, to swing at him with the long barrel of his gun; but as he did so his foot twisted on a rock and he plunged down upon the American.

Even before Dennis's fingers closed upon the fellow's great muscles, he knew that the man was a veritable giant. The Mexican towered above him. His wide, heavy shoulders were like iron to the touch. When the immense arms grappled Dennis close, in a bear-like hug that drove the breath from his body, the boy knew that he was lost unless his wits could save him.

He did not try to resist the terrible pressure on his body. Instead, he created a diversion. Drawing up both his feet, back of his foe's legs, he drove home the cruel Spanish spurs, roweling the man's calves from knee to ankle.

The giant roared out a furious oath of pain, and tore Gifford from his body. For an instant the two glared at each other. Dennis knew that the Hercules was gathering himself for another plunge at him. He saw something else, too, of which the bandit was not aware. The big man was standing on the very edge of the rimrock. If he should move one foot back a few inches, he would plunge down.

Dennis did not wait for the attack. With all the force of his strong young body he dived shoulder first, straight at the stomach of his opponent. The shock of the attack staggered the Mexican. He stepped back, trying not to lose his balance, and crashed down the hill like a log, rolling over and over as he gathered momentum.

Young Gifford's struggle with the giant had lasted scarcely ten seconds. Yet during that space of time the battle for the gold shipment had taken a new turn. Having driven away the escort, the bandits had all swarmed down upon the wagon, intent upon taking possession of the treasure. But the soldiers were now in the rocks above the cut, and it was their turn to fire down upon the huddle of moving figures below.

Before Dennis got into action with his Colt, he counted four flashes of light from the rocks. One of the outlaws cried that he was hit.

The fog having thinned somewhat, Dennis could see a dozen men crowded around the wagon. One was standing in its bed, swinging an ax at the lock of the trunk which held the gold.

From where Dennis sat crouched behind a rock it was a long shot for accuracy with a revolver. Nevertheless, he rested the barrel of the weapon on a bowlder, took careful aim, and fired.

The man stopped chopping. He stood stupidly for a moment, as though he did not know what to do. Then the ax haft slipped from his fingers and he sat heavily down.

Those in the rocks could almost see the wave of dismay that swept through the outlaws. They drew back from the wagon, uncertain what to do.

Lightly, a graceful figure leaped into the wagon and seized the ax. Dennis recognized it as that of Castro's lieutenant, Felipe. A moment later he saw some one on horseback who reminded

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him of the man who had surprised him in the garden. He took a shot at the rider, and missed.

THE next moment the clatter of horses' hoofs came to him, carried by the wind. Troopers and an officer poured into the cut.

Dennis stood up and gave a yell of triumph. Already the bandits were scuttling away.

Felipe leaped from the wagon bed to the back of a horse upon which another man was mounted. Bullets sang after the outlaws as they fled for their lives. One man dropped from a saddle. Two others were caught before they could reach horses. Troopers dashed through the cut after the *banditti.*

Antonio caught Dennis by the hand, as he came out from the rocks.

"*Viva,* King Geef-ford!" he cried, with an excited laugh. "You were in time, *amigo!*"

"Barely," replied Dennis. "I took the wrong road. The attack had begun before I reached here."

Lieutenant Rogers, recently out of West Point, was in a glow of delight. This was his first command in active service under fire, and he had pulled it off successfully. It was difficult for him to keep his boyish enthusiasm from breaking through the crust of curt *brusquerie* that he had been taught at the Academy.

He counted the casualties. Two of the troopers had been wounded, one seriously, the other in the hand. The *banditti* had been treated more roughly. The man who had been shot from the saddle during the retreat was dead. At least one of those who had escaped was hit. A third was badly hurt; he was the fellow whom Dennis had brought down in the wagon. Two others were captives.

Not since Castro had begun his savage career of outlawry had such a blow been struck at him. It was not so much that his band was depleted, for he could get plenty more men. But the prestige of his infamy, the legend of success and invulnerability which he had built up, would be shaken by the defeat just inflicted.

Rogers gruffly told Sergeant Brunton that he had done well to take to the hill instead of trying to defend the wagon from the cut, and the sergeant graciously acknowledged his debt to Antonio and Dennis.

The wounded men were put in the wagon and the cavalcade headed for Monterey. The lieutenant had decided that it would be better to return with the convoy and let his superior officer determine whether it should be sent out again at once.

Antonio and Dennis rode with him in the van. He asked questions of Gifford, many of them, in order to get full information for his report. This brought out the story of the encounter between Dennis and the giant.

"That must have been Pedro Soto," Antonio said. "There never was such a man for bull strength, if all they say is true. He can crush a heavy horseshoe in the palm of his hand. Pedro is of mixed Indian and Mexican blood; and he is as cruel as a wolf and as devoid of fear. I saw him once at a *fiesta.* He stands six foot three, and he weighs two hundred and thirty pounds. On a wager, he lifted a horse from the ground that day.—You escaped, *señor,* by a miracle. *Madre de Dios!* They say he can kill a bullock with one blow of his fist."

"His muscles are like steel," Dennis replied. "When he crushed the breath out of me, I knew that I was gone. But my spurs saved me."

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"And your wits!" the officer added.

The two civilians rode to the *Presidio* and told their story to the commandant, after which they descended the hill and turned up from Pacific Street, past the Soldiers' Theater, which had originally been built by Jack Swan for a sailors' boarding house and saloon.

"We're going to my home," Antonio explained. "I must tell my father what has occurred. It is for him to say whether we go on to-night or wait until Castro and his men are out of the hills through which we must pass."

Ramon Martinez decided immediately, as soon as he had heard the story of the young men, that it would be wiser for them to postpone their journey until it was safer.

CHAPTER VI.

RAMON MARTINEZ IS AFFRONTED.

FROM the window of his bedroom Dennis looked out upon a night that was at last quite clear of fog. A moon rode the heavens, and the waters of the bay had become a great pool of silver. The flying foam of the beating surf traced the shoreline in an irregular semicircle.

Into his mind there jumped a picture of Rosita pirouetting in the *jarabe,* as he watched the sea's rhythmic dance. Something strange had happened to him as he watched her. He didn't know how to put it into words; it was as though his heart had turned over and left him weak. He was no longer a boy who had run away from the brig upon which he had been beaten and knocked about by brutal seamen. He was a man; and the blinding revelation came to him that he was a man in love.

He had come into his inheritance, and it would be for him Rosita, or no other woman under heaven.—Why not? He was young and strong. This was his world—this California so rich in promise—if he had the courage and the wisdom to take it.

The caballeros had pride of race, but they recognized and accepted the energy of the Anglo-Saxon. Some of these maïdens of pure Castilian blood had wedded Americans. He felt that he had only to prove his worth—to Rosita and to her family—and in that lifted moment of high resolve this seemed an easy thing.

He turned from the window at last and undressed. He bathed his wounded arm, and tied another handkerchief around it, using his teeth to help him draw the knot tight. The dainty little bit of linen fringed with lace which Rosita had bound over the hurt he tucked safely away with her one-word message, in the pocket of his belt. They were souvenirs that he intended never to lose.

With so much to think about, he did not expect to sleep for a long time, but his head had scarcely fitted into the pillow before his eyes had closed. And he did not wake until morning...

AT breakfast he saw Rosita again. The rest of the family were there; and he saw them, too. His words and his casual attention were for them, but all the deeper current of his thoughts flowed toward her. Once she lifted her soft dark eyes and looked at him, then the long curling lashes drooped to the olive cheeks, demurely. But that long deep look sent a tingling excitement throbbing through him.

Breakfast and his cigarette finished, Ramon Martinez called his three older sons and Dennis into the garden with

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him. He drew from a pocket a letter which had been sent him by a messenger, and which had arrived just before they sat down to eat.

The tall, strong, broad-shouldered Californian looked around upon his slender sons and the guest of his household.

"I have here an insulting message," he said. "It is signed, 'Juan Bandini, *alias* Juan Castro.' To you, my sons, I read it because it is well that you be on your guard against an impudent and murderous ruffian. To you, Señor Geef-ford, I read it because there is in it a reference to you which it would be well for you to hear."

There was a stir of interest among the young men, but none of them spoke. This was an absorbing business. What could this bandit, Castro, have to write about to Ramon Martinez, a caballero of California, honored by all who knew him?

"For the benefit of our guest I shall translate as I go," Martinez continued. "This is the letter:

"Esteemed señor, as one gentleman to another, I desire your friendship and your regard. I have the honor to ask you for the hand of your daughter Rosita in marriage. For that young señorita I hold much love in my heart, and what Juan Castro wants he gets. As you know, I am engaged in a patriotic campaign to free our beloved country from the conqueror. —Viva California! Viva Castro! Viva Martinez!—To that end I give my life and my fortune. As one honorable caballero to another, I offer myself as a suitor.

"It is with much regret that I learn you have harbored as a guest an American scoundrel whom I intend to kill at the earliest opportunity. He is in my way, and I shall sweep him into oblivion. The man is doomed.

"As friends and relatives, Juan Castro and Ramon Martinez can work to great mutual advantage. In alliance with you, I would refuse to assist that vile American, Benjamin Shanks, to despoil you. Instead of driving the cattle from your ranchos, I would protect you from any thieving robbers who might wish to raid them. Together we would be invincible. May God preserve you many years.

"Your servant and friend,

"Juan Bandini,
alias Juan Castro."

Ramon Martinez read the letter slowly, searching for the correct English words of translation as he went. Once he stopped to clench his teeth, a fire of anger burning in his cheeks at the presumption of the bandit; but presently he conquered his rage and continued to the finish.

"TO read such a letter shames me," he exclaimed and tore the paper into shreds. "But I wish you, my sons, to let the memory of this man's infamous threats and pretensions remain in your minds. Therefore I have read what he has written. His assumptions of equality are more intolerable than his threats. To your sisters, not a word of this. Your mother already knows. You are to remember that he is dangerous, and you are to guard well the safety of your sisters."

To this the young men pledged themselves.

"It's a strange letter," Dennis commented. "He is full of flourishes and courtesy, but every few words the threats break through. It is not all of a piece, somehow."

Guillermo made a guess.

"Might it not be this way? He is not educated, and he asks Felipe Pacheco to write the letter. But he can't let Felipe alone. He has to crowd his threats in, along with the compliments."

"Perhaps," his father assented. "But it does not matter. You have

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heard what he says. It is our duty to help trap the wolf and put an end to the menace of him.—For you, young man, look well to your life. I advise you, *amigo mio,* to travel far from here, where this scoundrel's vengeance cannot reach you. You once mentioned the gold camps. There you might be safe."

The last sentences of the old caballero were addressed to the guest.

"Does one run away from a mad dog? Or does one shoot it?" Dennis asked. "This Castro makes a great gesture, as though he were God, but he is only an outlaw with a price on his head. He cannot doom me to death whenever he pleases. When his time comes, he'll be rubbed out. After the grass is thick on his forgotten grave I may live many years."

"That is true," replied Martinez gravely. "But one must not be rash. You have heard the stories they tell about him—that some of your countrymen once flogged him with a rawhide whip, for stealing a horse at one of the gold camps? I do not know whether it is as they say. The tale is that all five men who whipped him have died, swiftly and violently—by the knife or by the bullet—and all within two or three years. Castro swore to be revenged, and he paid his debt in full."

"So the legend has grown that Castro is invincible?" Dennis said with a smile. "But is he? I am just a boy, a runaway from a ship officered by crimps who shanghaied me. Castro slashed me with a knife; he shot at me when I was unarmed. Antonio and I faced four of his band, and they drew back without attacking. We spoiled his *coup* to get the gold convoy. I have been in battle with him and his men, and by the grace of God I came out unhurt. He is dangerous—yes. As the mad dog I spoke of is dangerous until it has been shot down.—I think I shall not run away yet."

The caballero answered the young man's smile understandingly. He respected that valiant defiance, but he doubted greatly its wisdom.

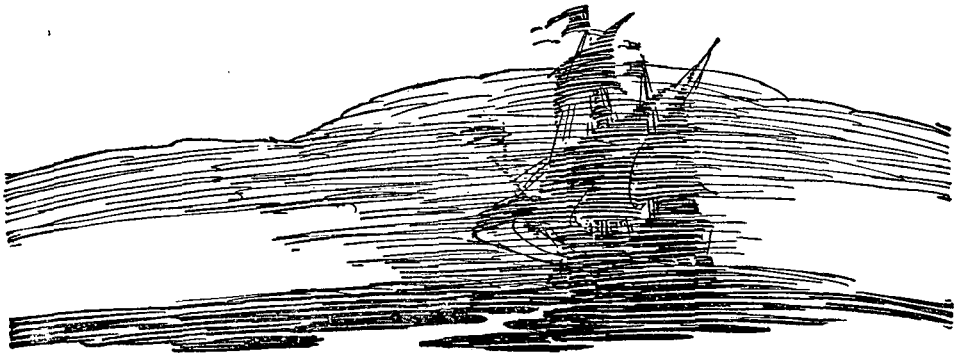
"You are one; he and his band are many. They have spies among the *vaqueros.* Information is carried to them by these worthless allies. The bandits ride by night. No warning comes to the victim, until—"

Martinez lifted his hands, with an expressive shrug of his shoulders.

"Yet I shall stay," Dennis said quietly.

"Then God keep you safe!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



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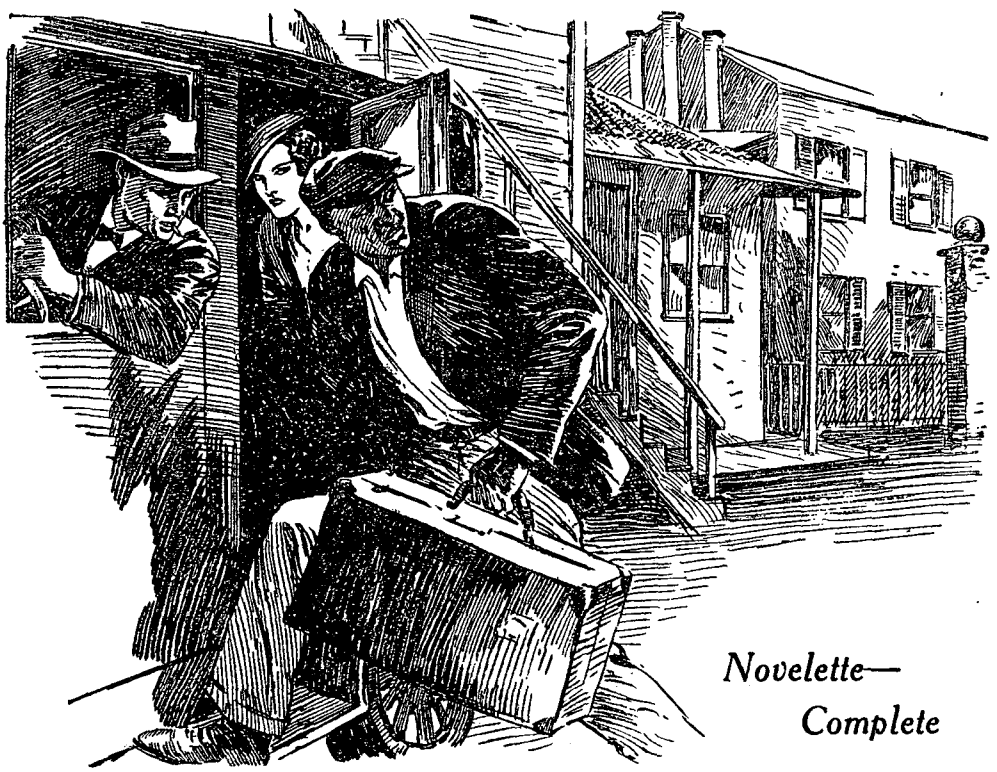
Whose Money?

By FRED MacISAAC

Author of "Sabotage," "The Devil and the Deep," etc.

It wasn't Stanton's suitcase—he didn't even know what was in it—but if all the crooks in New Orleans wanted it, so did he



Novelette—Complete

CHAPTER I.

THE MYSTERIOUS MR. GAUTIER.

"ONE HUNDRED golden hours at sea" was the way that steamship folder had described the boat trip from New York to New Orleans. As the hundredth golden hour began, Stanley Stanton leaned on the rail up forward and gazed upon the shore of the Mississippi River. Around the bend lay New Orleans.

While the voyage had not been exciting, he had enjoyed it because it was the first time he had been at sea. It had been a disappointment that there were no charming girls on the rather slim passenger list. When a fellow is twenty-six, and making his first ocean voyage, he is all agog for romance. Instead, he had had to put up with Mr. Alphonse Gautier.

Mr. Gautier had the adjoining seat in the dining saloon. In appearance he was fantastic. His head was entirely

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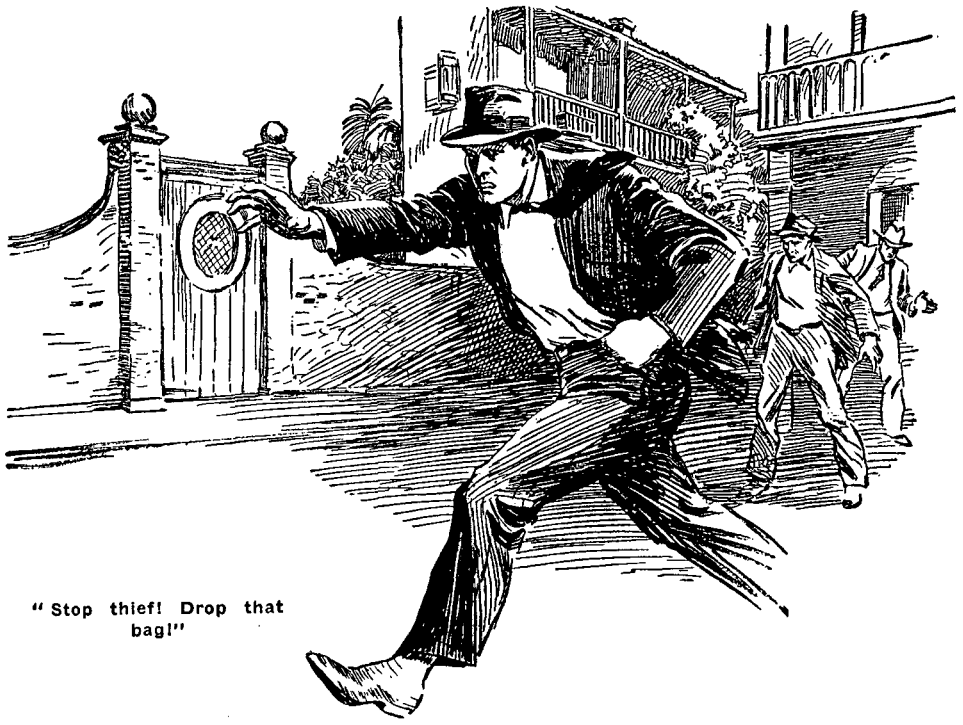
without hair, and the shining pate was huge. Stanley later discovered that he wore a number eight hat.

The man had a nose which suggested the famous nose of Cyrano de Bergerac. His black eyes were at the bottom of two deep caverns. He wore a mustache and Vandyke beard that was suspiciously black—dyed, of course. His great head was set upon a thick, very short neck, which made him appear round-shouldered, although his back was as straight as a ramrod. His height was about five feet three or four.



"Stop thief! Drop that bag!"

Stanley was repelled by the fellow at first; later he was grateful for his company, since he was the most interesting person on board. His ugliness was redeemed by a very bright smile—his teeth were snow white, and were perfectly formed, and his voice was a musical baritone. He spoke admirable English, though with a faint foreign intonation.

Gautier was a native of New Orleans who had been abroad for more than a generation. He was returning for a short visit. Apparently he had been everywhere and had seen everything, and he could describe places and things in a manner to delight a chap who worked in an advertising office and who didn't know whether he ever would have a chance to see the world. He told tales of adventure in Bali, Banda, and Cashmere. He described such weird places as the Gobi Desert, the African Bund, the Galapagos Islands, and Easter Island. He had a gift for painting pictures with words, had Gautier.

As Stanley leaned on the rail, he was thinking that from Gautier he had learned more of geography, philosophy and the manners and customs of

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strange races than from the professors at Princeton. And there was a mystery about the man. His own business in such remote regions was never once explained, nor his reason for remaining away from his native city for a generation, nor his purpose in revisiting it.

At the same time, Stan didn't know whether he really liked the man or had been hypnotized by his personality.

All of a sudden Gautier appeared at his elbow.

"Nearing our journey's end," he stated. "I wonder if you know—?"

Then he told of the beginning of the great Southern city; of its struggle against the river, disease, and savages. He drew, with a few vivid sentences, a picture of the Creole days before the American occupation. He told a historic incident unknown to Stanley Stanton—how, when New Orleans was about to be attacked by a British army fresh from victory at Waterloo, the American commander, General Jackson, whose forces were one-fifth as strong as those of the invaders, was joined by Lafitte and his French pirates, several hundred strong. The pirates fought like wild men ad contributed largely to the American victory of New Orleans.

WHILE Gautier talked, the ship lay her steel side against the levee, and black men swarmed from the warehouses, caught the lines and made her fast. A dozen men and women appeared beside the gangplank, about to be lifted to the steamer's rail. Friends of passengers.

"You have no one to meet you in New Orleans?" said Gautier.

"No, sir."

"Nor I.—A tourist has no opportunity to see the real New Orleans. If you like—"

He broke off suddenly and faded from Stanton's side.

Surprised, Stanley looked around. Gautier had backed against the deckhouse. His tanned cheeks were without color; his black eyes were gleaming, and with his right hand he was caressing nervously his black whiskers.

"Don't appear to notice me," he said in a low tone. "Above all, don't call my name."

Although perplexed, Stanley nodded and once more gazed down upon the levee. There was a new arrival below now; a most remarkable looking person. It was not yet five o'clock in the afternoon, and it was still daylight; but this individual wore evening clothes with a top hat, and a long black coat which was lined with scarlet satin. He carried a thick walking stick with a gold knob on it, which was attached to his wrist by a leather strap.

This man was gray-haired, and his dark skin was clean shaven. He had a large arched nose and a long, narrow, pointed chin. His large, protruding black eyes were scanning the rail of the steamer intently.

"Mr. Stanton," called Gautier softly from behind, "please join me in my quarters immediately. It is most important."

He glided away, keeping close to the deckhouse and out of sight from the levee below, and vanished through the companion entrance. Intrigued, Stanley followed him.

IT was the first time he had entered Gautier's cabin, which was the largest and best on the ship. In the center of the room stood a wardrobe trunk, a big yellow pigskin bag and a small, square, black suitcase.

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"Have you a bag which might contain this?" he demanded, pointing to the black case.

"Yes, sir, but it is filled with my belongings."

The man drew forth a wallet and extracted two one-hundred-dollar bills.

"This will reimburse you for the value of your goods," he said. "Please drop your clothing over the side and place my bag in your suitcase."

"I don't understand—"

"Later, I shall explain. There is no time to lose."

"My stuff isn't worth fifty dollars, sir."

"No matter. The favor is worth two hundred dollars. There is no customs examination, you understand. You run no risk."

"Okay," said Stanley. "Only why—?"

Gautier thrust the bag into his hand and pushed him from the cabin. Stanley, dubious and excited, carried the bag to his own stateroom, which was on the side of the ship farthest from the levee. There he opened his own bag, took out a tweed suit and some linen and reluctantly thrust them through his porthole—reluctantly, because he was a young man who was not well to do, and he hated waste.

He made room for the black bag in his big suitcase, and had just locked and strapped it when the steward knocked.

"All ashore, sir," the man said. "Luggage ready?"

Laden with Stanley's two suitcases, the steward preceded the New Yorker down the gangplank. Stanton, halfway down, saw Gautier as he was accosted by the tall dark man with the scarlet lined opera cloak. The stranger lifted his hat, and so did Gautier. Then they both stepped forward, extended their arms, and embraced. The dark man leaned down and kissed Gautier on the right cheek. Gautier reciprocated. After that, arm in arm, they moved away.

He saw a uniformed chauffeur spring from the box of a huge black limousine and open a door; and the tall man ushered Gautier inside the car, which immediately drove off.

Then Stanton remembered that he had not informed Gautier of his own destination. After all, there were not many big hotels in New Orleans, and the queer Creole would surely be able to locate him easily enough. He would go to the Carlos, the historic hotel which the guide book said embodied all the traditions of old New Orleans.

CHAPTER II.

THE THIEF.

AT the Carlos, Stanley secured a room and bath on the twelfth floor for three dollars, and after he had been installed in it he decided he would not unpack at the moment, but instead go out and stroll around the strange city and fill his eyes with it.

He wished he knew people here. There was no special fun in seeing the town alone. Half his reason for making the steamer trip was the hope of acquiring friends *en route,* with whom he could play around in New Orleans. Probably it was a good thing that he had been able to do a slight favor for Gautier. The least the mysterious Frenchman could do when he recovered his property would be to entertain Stanley a little.

Stanton crossed Canal Street, and wandered about the narrow thoroughfares of the old city, peering into the windows of antique shops and gaz-

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ing at the forbidding façades of residences. He wondered what they were like inside. He had read that these old French and Spanish houses were built around patios, and were charming within if unattractive without.

Finally, he decided that he had better return to the hotel and bathe, and decide where he would dine.

He turned on the water in his tub, and undressed in the chamber, throwing his clothes on the bed. Stripped, Stanley Stanton was a powerful looking youth. College rowing had developed the muscles of his arms, legs and shoulders. He had thick brown hair, clear brown eyes, a straight nose and a good chin. He had a job as an "idea man" with a New York advertising agency, but so far his ideas had been worth only sixty dollars a week.

He got into the tub and as he scrubbed he crooned a popular song.

Click!

He had absent-mindedly closed his bathroom door. Now it sounded as if the key had been turned in the lock.

Somebody had locked his bathroom door!

There was an old fashioned lock on it, and as he entered he had observed that the key was on the outside, not the inside.

He listened. He heard footsteps in his room, and a bump, as if one of his bags had been dropped upon the floor. Stanton was out of the tub. Very gently he turned the knob. The door was locked, all right. And his clothes were thrown on the bed in the chamber. There was no exit from the bath except through the chamber.

"Well, I'll be—!" he breathed.

The window! He moved to the window. It was on the front of the house. Twelve stories below, traffic seethed. All his money—three hundred dollars, and the two century notes which had been given him by Gautier—were in his trousers pocket. Already some hotel thief was at work.

There was no way of informing the management.

He lifted the window, which slipped up noiselessly, revealing a ledge, eight or ten inches wide. If he called an alarm, he couldn't be heard from the street, and a shout would warn the thief.

He leaned out. Three feet away was one of his chamber windows, with an equally wide ledge. The room had been warm, upon first entering it, and the bellboy had thrown up this window before leaving.

Stanley Stanton grabbed a bath towel and tied it around his waist. He wiped his feet on the mat to dry them, and in a second he was crouching on the ledge of the bathroom window.

He stood up, holding on to the upper sash. Three feet—if he missed, a hundred-foot drop. He put out one of his long legs, set it firmly on the ledge of the chamber window, stretched out a long arm, and gripped the sash of that window. After a breathless fraction of a second he transferred himself to the open bedroom window. Instantly the light in his chamber went out.

IN a flash he had stooped and precipitated himself through the window. *Thump!* He alighted on the carpet, and darted toward the door, which somebody was opening.

He banged against the door, which was already open six inches, and slammed it shut. Then he grappled with a dark form which had been endeavoring to get out of the room. It was surprisingly slight, clad in soft material; and it emitted a scared squeal.

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Astonished, he released his prisoner, fumbled for the light switch, found it, and flooded the room with radiance.

"You ought to be ashamed!" cried a soft, slurring soprano voice.

"Oh, good Lord!" he gasped as he hastily turned out the light.

He had forgotten that he was naked, and he had seen, for a tenth of a second, a young and very pretty woman.

"Get into that bathroom and make it snappy!" he exclaimed. "Quick—or I'll turn on the light again."

He heard her move toward the bathroom door and turn the key; then the door opened and the bathroom light outlined a slender, graceful figure as she slipped within.

Stanley closed the door upon her and turned the key.

"Tit for tat!" he cried triumphantly.

After that he proceeded to dry himself with the bathtowel which had performed such notable service and then to get into his clothes.

He slid his hand into his pocket and found his wallet.—He examined its contents. Safe. So far so good.—What in the devil did she want, then?—Ah!

His big suitcase was on the floor beside the bed, and there was a long gash in the leather—nine inches at least. Beside it, on the floor, lay a small pearl-handled pocket knife.

"So that's what she wanted?" he muttered.

He crossed to the bathroom, unlocked the door and threw it wide open.

"Come out!" he commanded brusquely.

THERE entered a girl so lovely that he drew in his breath involuntarily. She had a thick mass of very lustrous jet-black hair. Her skin was olive and clear. Her eyes were enormous and black as ink. Her nose was flawless, and her little mouth, drawn down lugubriously at the corners, was absolutely delicious. A small head was set upon a thin, graceful neck; and her figure, slight but charmingly feminine, was dressed in a black suit with a white undervest. He noticed that her ankles were exceptionally slender, and that her feet, in their high-heeled slippers, were tiny.

"Bustin' in here with no clothes on at all!" she said, as though he and not she were the culprit.

"I had a bathtowel, miss," he retorted. "So you are a hotel thief?"

"You're going to be mean, like all Yankees," she observed with a quaint Southern drawl.

Stanley eyed her grimly.

"You've a monumental gall!" he stated. "Have you anything to say for yourself, before I call the police?"

She put her hands behind her back and lifted an adorable chin.

"I don't believe I have the pleasure of your acquaintance, suh," she replied pertly.

He bowed ironically.

"I'm the fellow who was in the tub and whom you locked in so you could rob his bedroom at your leisure," he replied.

She moved her head from right to left

"Fo' the life of me, I can't see how you got out," she exclaimed.

He grinned, in spite of his just anger.

"I'm an acrobat by profession, and climbing in and out of twelve-story windows is pie to me, Miss Robin Hood. You ought to see me climb up the wall of a building!—It's all in knowing how to use your fingers and toes."

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"Humph!" she retorted. "An acrobat!—I knew you were some kind o' trash!"

It was too much for him, and he yielded to the need for laughter.

"You brazen little thief!" he exclaimed.

She stamped one small foot and pointed a slender forefinger at him.

"Don't you call me a thief!" she cried, with cheeks that were suffused with a dark crimson. "I came here for something you have no right to. And you had no business bargin' in through that windo'."

He bowed. "Please be seated, Miss Impudence. Suppose you explain about this something that I have no right to. How did you find out about it? I've been in your interesting city only a short time."

"I'll bandy no words," she said haughtily. "I'm going now, and don't you try to stop me."

SHE took a step toward the door. Instantly he was upon her, and he forced her rudely into a chair. "You will have to change your tune, miss, if you don't want to land in jail. I've caught you red-handed.—Is that your knife."

He pointed to the pearl-handled affair on the floor.

She nodded.

"Give it to me, please," she coolly requested.

He stooped and put it into his pocket. "You're a cute kid," he admitted. "'Fess up now, and maybe I'll give you a break. Why did you pick out my room, when there are hundreds of others in this hotel? How did you dare enter, when you could hear me singing in the bathroom?"

"You sing dreadful!" she stated, with a perfectly serious countenance.

"So I've been told.—Why did you overlook a roll of money in my pants pocket, and why ruin a good suitcase with that bowie knife of yours?"

She folded her hands on her lap and gazed demurely at the floor.

"I reckon you better call the police," she said sweetly. "I ain't going to satisfy yo' curiosity in any respect whatsoever."

He gazed at her dubiously. She was so pretty, so delicious; and he had a lot rather kiss her than send her to jail. If she wasn't so darned exasperating—

"Are you any relation to a big man who wears evening clothes during the daytime, and a scarlet-lined opera cloak?" he asked shrewdly.

"You better send for the officers, Yankee," she said sharply. "I answer no questions!"

"Aw, say! It'd be a crime to turn you over to the cops."

He made to touch her kindly on the shoulder. She pulled away.

"Only a cur would take advantage of my situation to make love to me!" she said scornfully.

His expression was so stricken that the strange young woman was unable to control her lips, which parted slightly and revealed two rows of small, perfect teeth.

"You flatter yourself, miss," he said angrily. "I meant to let you go, because you are young and attractive; but I'm not trying to make love to a lady crook.—You stay right where you are. I'm going to call the police."

He moved toward the house phone.

"Stan' still!" she said sharply.

He had turned away from her, and when he looked back it was to look into the muzzle of a small pearl-handled revolver which had mysteriously appeared in her hand.

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"I want that black bag," she said, stoutly. "If I have to shoot you to get it, I'm a-goin' to shoot."

"Now look here, don't be a fool!" he pleaded, and took a step toward her.

"YOU stand back," she commanded, but impulsively she took two steps toward him.

Stanley had transferred his gaze to a point beyond her right shoulder.

"Grab her, Murphy!" he exclaimed suddenly.

Her head twisted to the right, involuntarily, and with ease and dispatch Stanton's two hands grasped her right hand and removed the little weapon.

"Oh, you beast! Yo' lyin' beast!" she cried furiously. "There was nobody there at all!"

He grinned at her exasperatingly.

"Now, you beautiful young murderess," he stated. "You are going to tell me what this is all about."

She placed her hands behind her back, lifted her pretty little chin and met his eyes defiantly.

"I ain't tellin' you nothin'," she asserted.

"Then you'll talk to the police," he said grimly.

"You don't dare to call the police," she retorted. "You got something you haven't any right to. You'll find yourself in a bad fix, Mr. Smart Aleck of New York. You give me back my pistol and open that door and let me out of here—or you'll be sorry."

He hesitated. Her attitude infuriated him, but what did he know about Gautier? Maybe Gautier had persuaded him to bring stolen goods into New Orleans. Suppose the bag contained narcotics. Gautier was very familiar with the Far East, and—

"There ain't nothin' you can do at all," the young woman said indiscreetly, and accompanied her remark with a smile which was both dazzling and irritating.

He glared at her. She added insult to injury by displaying to him the tip of a small, pointed, dark red tongue.

"Oh, there isn't, eh?"

He swooped down upon her, crushed her arms to her sides, with his great strength, swung her off her feet. Carrying her to the bed, he sat down on the edge of it and laid her across his knees.

Thud! Thud! Thud! Stanley Stanton was spanking the Southern young lady. Her legs swished about viciously, but harmlessly. Her hands clawed at his thighs, but not a sound came from her throat. After a dozen heavy wallops, he stood her upon her feet and grinned at her offensively.

"Now you can take yourself off!" he remarked.

But his smile faded. The girl was ghastly white. She was actually shaking with the violence of her rage. Her lovely eyes had narrowed to two gleaming black slits, and her upper lip was drawn back to display beautiful but savage little teeth.

"I'm goin' to kill you!" she gritted. "Some awful way you got to die, you Yankee swine, you!"

Stanley went to the door, opened it, and pointed silently to the exit. As she passed him her gaze was so baleful that he pretended to shudder.

He closed the door, locked it, and gazed ruefully at his slit suitcase.

The girl was a savage, and yet she was lovely. She had been frightfully humiliated by his treatment of her. If she had had her toy pistol at the moment when he finished spanking her, undoubtedly she would have emptied it into him with pleasure.

She was a brazen little thief, and

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she ought to be locked up. He was letting her off easy. Just the same, he somehow wished he hadn't spanked her.

CHAPTER III.

THE SECOND INTRUDER.

THE question was, who was she? How had she got into his room? How had she known he had Gautier's black bag? Where had she got her audacity? He could like a girl like her, if he met her under conventional circumstances. He loved her cute little accent. There was no doubt that she was well bred—a lady. What desperate circumstances, then, had persuaded her to take such a terrible chance?

What was in the black bag? And what was he to do now? He wanted to go out to dinner, but he dared not leave Gautier's property here unguarded. After all, the man had paid him two hundred dollars to care for it, and he had said he would call or send for it very soon.

Better have dinner sent up. To-night he would have to pass up the "Oysters, Rockefeller," and the pompano cooked in a paper bag which he had expected to eat in one of the famous Creole restaurants.

A tap on his door broke in upon his reflections.

"Come in," he called. "Oh—!"

For a man had entered the room, placed his back against the door, and was covering Stanton with a black automatic.

"Hand me that black bag," he said in a low tense tone, "and be quick about it!"

"I—I don't know what you're talking about," stammered the young man, who was properly impressed by the dangerous looking weapon.

"Do what I tell you," the stranger said menacingly.

"There are my bags—no black one among them," he said in a shaking voice.

"Don't budge from that chair," said the gunman.

He moved on tiptoe toward the bag that was on the floor in the middle of the room. There he crouched, facing Stanton, gun ready, and reached for the big with his left hand.

At that instant there was a loud knock on the door. The fellow whirled. The weapon swung to bear on the door and Stanley Stanton plunged at him with the speed of a leaping cat. He dove head first across a space of five feet. His head struck the robber's shoulder, his outstretched left hand grasped the weapon and ripped it out of the man's grasp. The thief went to the floor, Stanton on top of him; and with great satisfaction Stanley jammed the nose of the pistol against the intruder's chest.

"Come—in!" he called.

A bellboy entered, bearing a note on a nickel tray. He stared in astonishment at the spectacle on the floor. Rising to his feet, Stanton stood over the criminal, the weapon pointed at him significantly.

"Get on the phone and call the house detective," he snapped. "This man has just broken into my room and pulled a gun on me. I want him placed under arrest."

The fellow on the floor sat up and gazed balefully at the New Yorker.

"You'll sup grief for this!" he said in a low tone. "Better let me go."

"You'll go—with the police."

At the phone, the bellboy was excitedly demanding the house detective.

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"He'll be here in a minute, sir," he said. "I brought up a letter for you."

INSIDE of two minutes a burly plain clothes man presented himself.

"What's the trouble here?" he demanded roughly.

"This man came into the room with this pistol," replied Stanton. "He was about to make off with one of my bags, when the bellboy knocked on the door. The fellow failed to keep me covered, and I jumped him and disarmed him."

"And a good job, too," declared the detective. "Let's have a look at you," he demanded of the thief, who was still on his haunches on the floor.

"A new boy, as far as I know," the detective commented. "But they probably have his prints at headquarters.—You'll have to appear against him in the morning, sir."

"I'll be glad to!"

"You'll wish you never was born," asserted the crook, who rose to his feet at a suggestion from one of the house officer's big boots.

When the officer and his prisoner and the bellboy had departed, Stanley went to the window and thrust his head out. He was shaking with excitement and considerable alarm.

"Stepped into something," he muttered. "I've earned my two hundred dollars in pay already, by heck!"

In a moment he remembered the letter which the bellboy had placed on his desk, and he hastened to open it.

There was no signature. It was written in a beautiful script, with old-fashioned scrolls and shading, and it read:

Dear Mr. Stanton,

I regret to impose upon your kindness, but circumstances over which I have no control make it impossible for me to relieve you of my property tonight.—Disregard persons purporting to represent me. Beware of thieves, but do not appeal to the police under any circumstances. I promise that you will be munificently rewarded if you keep my property safe for me.

Stanley folded the letter, replaced it in its envelope, and thrust the envelope into his breast pocket.

"'Don't appeal to the police,'" he muttered. "Just hold onto it! Let them murder me if necessary, just to oblige an old nut who will 'munificently reward' me—if I live that long."

He paced the room in a state of mind.

"Suspicious, his anxiety to keep away from the police," he said to himself. "Stolen goods, maybe.—Jewels? Suppose it should be opium?—Well, Mr. Alphonse Gautier, since circumstances prevent you from collecting your property, and since people keep coming in here with guns, and the police mustn't be asked to protect me, I'm going to see what kind of trouble I've got myself into. And if you don't like the way I do business, the heck with you!"

He opened his suitcase and removed the black bag, set it on his table and scowled at it. He was a young man who disliked to be false to a trust, but since he had already turned the second thief over, the police were quite likely to come barging in on him; and if it were a fact that he had stolen goods in his possession, he would soon find himself in the calaboose. Succor from Alphonse Gautier, in that event, was not to be expected.

"I'm sorry, old man," he said aloud as he attacked the lock on the bag with a corkscrew attachment on his pocket knife.

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The lock yielded readily and he lifted the cover. The bag contained four packages, each one about three inches by eight inches by six inches, wrapped neatly in heavy manila paper.

He lifted one out and hesitated. It was not heavy. He shook it, but it did not rattle.

CHAPTER IV.

WHAT WAS IN THE BAG.

"HERE goes!" he said, and tore off the cover of the package. Inside was a mass of folded white paper—paper so light as to be almost tissue. He drew out one of the folded slips and opened it. It was a note of the Bank of France for one thousand francs.

French paper money differs from American legal tender in that a hundred-franc note is engraved on a larger slip of paper than a twenty-franc note, and a five-hundred-franc note is larger than a hundred-franc-note, and a thousand-franc-note is fully twice as large as a five-hundred-franc bill, while a ten-thousand-franc bill is almost as big as a paper napkin. It is an excellent system, since one does not make mistakes in payment as frequently as happens with American bank notes.

His eyes popping, his hands shaking, Stanton examined the contents of the package. It contained two hundred and fifty thousand-franc notes. And if the other packages contained the same sum, he had in his possession a million francs.

Frantically, he opened the other packages. Five hundred thousand francs—seven hundred and fifty thousand francs—a million—wait! The fourth package contained the huge notes for ten thousand francs, and there were a hundred and twenty-five of them. In that black bag there had been two million francs—worth something above a hundred thousand dollars in American money, at the present rate of exchange.

Stanley Stanton had never in his life possessed more than two or three thousand dollars, and so the knowledge that he had under his hand a sizable fortune thrilled him tremendously. Even though it wasn't his money, he was thrilled—and fearful.

Stolen money, of course. Otherwise Gautier would not have been carrying cash, and he would not have feared to carry it ashore. Probably it was Stanley's duty to get right on the phone and call the police. On the other hand, the man was obviously being pursued by criminals—that girl, the fellow with the automatic, the person with the scarlet-lined opera coat whom Gautier had not wished to recognize him on the ship, and with whom he had driven off after he had parked his fortune with Stanley Stanton. But suppose Gautier was entitled to the money and had legitimate reasons for wishing to avoid police attention?

So far, anyhow, the treasure was safe. In the morning, Gautier might call for his millions. Stanley wondered what the queer Creole would regard as a munificent reward—a thousand dollars maybe. Worth having.

Suppose they broke in and murdered him in his sleep? He inspected the bolt on the door. It was strong. The pass key in the possession of the girl would be of no avail if the door was bolted. And there was no way of coming in through the windows. He decided he would hold the fort.

He phoned room service and ordered dinner, requesting that certain maga-

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zines and the evening newspapers be sent up. It was worth wasting one evening, if there was a prospect of earning "munificent remuneration."

Dinner he ate in solitary state. For two hours, he read magazines and newspapers, and finally decided to go to bed. He had stuffed the black bag with magazines and wadded newspapers, and placed it on his table, after he had succeeded in relocking it. A nocturnal marauder might see it, grasp it and retreat, satisfied, assuming that he had obtained what he wanted. The package of money he had packed in his own suitcase, shoving it under the bed.

Then he bolted the door, closed and fastened the windows, undressed and went to bed.

IT was his intention to lie awake most of the night, but in less than half an hour he fell asleep, and the next thing he knew, the telephone was ringing.

It was broad daylight. The black bag was still visible on his table, and his watch said eight-thirty A. M. He rolled out of bed to answer the phone. It was the hotel manager, who informed him that the thief whom the hotel detective had turned over to the police had been bailed out, and that his hearing had been set for Friday morning at ten. This was Tuesday morning.

Setting down the telephone, he unlocked his big suitcase, into which he had stuffed the French banknotes. They were safe, and he sighed with relief. He was sure to hear from Gautier pretty soon. A man didn't leave a hundred thousand in cash in strange hands any longer than was absolutely necessary.

He phoned room service for the combination breakfast advertised on a card on his bureau, and proceeded to take a shower bath. Feeling refreshed and cheerful, he dressed and sat down to wait for his breakfast.

He wondered if Gautier would know anything about the beautiful young thief. That girl was too lovely to be mixed up in such a business as this. The man who had followed her example in breaking into the room, and whom Stanton had turned over to the police, was certainly not a fit associate for her. If he was. He was a low-browed scoundrel.

Maybe she wasn't associated with him. Perhaps he belonged to another gang—

Oh, pshaw! There couldn't be two gangs—

A knock on Stanton's door put a stop to his cogitations. He unbolted and opened it, expecting to see the waiter with a tray. Instead there was on the threshold a solid looking citizen with a round, red face and a pair of gimlet eyes.

"DETECTIVE SERGEANT McCARTHY from headquarters," he said gruffly. "I want a few minutes of your time, Mr. Stanton."

"Oh," exclaimed Stanley, who felt as though he had been hit in the pit of the stomach. "Why—er—sure. Come in."

The sergeant entered, casting a keen glance around the room and focusing his gaze upon its occupant.

"You're a friend of Alphonse Gautier, I believe?" he queried.

"Well—er, hardly a friend. We were fellow passengers on the steamer which came in from New York last night."

"The ship's officers say you were together all the time," the man insisted.

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Stanley sat down because his knees were weak.

He was sure that he was about to be arrested as a confederate of Gautier, who obviously was some kind of law-breaker.

"We talked a lot," he said, "but I don't know him very well."

"We're trying to get a line on him.—Did he tell you anything about himself? What his business was? Who his friends in New Orleans were?"

"No, he merely discussed things in general. All I know about him is that he was born in New Orleans, and that he was returning here for the first time in thirty years."

The officer had been moving about the room.

His eyes rested on the black bag, and then moved away.

Stanley breathed more easily.

"You expect to hear from him?" the detective demanded.

"Why—er—I don't know. We didn't say good-by. I didn't tell him to what hotel I was going, and I haven't his address."

"It's the morgue," said the Sergeant, roughly. "Hey, young fellow, what's the matter with you?"

Stanley was deadly pale, his eyes were filled with terror.

"You mean to tell me he's *dead?*" he gasped.

"Murdered, about two o'clock this morning.—Damn curious case!"

Stanton wiped his forehead. "It doesn't seem possible," he murmured. "You don't suspect—?"

Mr. McCarthy laughed good-naturedly.

"Lord, no!" he declared. "We've checked up on you. You haven't been out of this room since a short while before dinner last night. You captured a sneak thief, and turned him over to the hotel dick. You had dinner here—and here comes your breakfast."

For the waiter had entered.

CHAPTER V.

ANYBODY'S MONEY.

"I DON'T think I'll be able to eat," said Stanley with a pained smile.

"Mr. Gautier was alive and well, last night."

"We get used to violent deaths in my business," said the sergeant. "Mind if I have a piece of toast and some of your coffee."

Without waiting for consent, he seated himself at the table which the waiter had set up, and dug in.

"Naturally, we made inquiries on the boat," explained the officer. "That's why I'm calling on you."

"Tell me how it happened."

"He was killed in the Gautier homestead in the Vieux Carré. That's the old city," explained the officer. "Patrolman Waller, on the beat, saw lights in the second floor of this house, and he knew that it hadn't been tenanted for three years. In fact, he had a key of the front door. He entered and went upstairs. He found two candelabras lighted in the drawing room, and the body of this Gautier lying on the floor. He was pierced through the middle by an old French dueling sword, and he was quite dead, though the body was still warm. The patrolman would have thought there had been a duel, only he couldn't find Gautier's sword. He identified the body from papers on it.—Was Gautier a queer looking duck with a big bald head and no neck to speak of, a man who was about five feet three or four?"

Stanley nodded. He felt very ill and frightened, somehow.

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"That's the way the skipper of the steamer described him," said the detective. "Well, according to the town records, this fellow was born in 1869. His family was one of the oldest in New Orleans. They used to belong to the nobility, in France. Everybody supposed he was dead and the family extinct, and so the house was sold for taxes, a few years ago."

"Then he has no heirs?" asked Stanton eagerly.

"No relations, so far as anybody knows. It's a queer case, Mr. Stanton."

The officer had by this time completely consumed the young man's breakfast. He wiped his close-cropped mustache with Stanley's napkin, and leaned back with a sigh of satisfacti .1.

"Here's a guy that has been away from town for a generation, and the first night he comes back, somebody sticks a sword in his gizzard. I looked the ground over myself. A couple of old chairs were overturned, and there were shoe tracks in the dust on the old oak floor. But nothing that does us any good."

"I should think," said Stanley, "that if you found out why he left New Orleans thirty years ago, and with whom he associated, that— Maybe he got into trouble?"

"That's pretty far back on the records. We may dig up something, though.—You're sure he didn't speak of anybody he expected to see in New Orleans, nor tell you anything at all about his plans?"

Stanton hesitated. To mention the man in the opera coat, and to speak of Gautier's obvious apprehension of the man would entail revealing something of the black bag transaction, and would perhaps bring police suspicion on himself. Though the detective admitted he had learned that Stanton hadn't left his room all night, Stanton knew he might be held as an accessory or a material witness. Either would probably mean incarceration.

"No, he didn't tell me anything," he said flatly.

"Too bad.—Now tell me about yourself. Who are you? What's your business? How come you are in New Orleans, and so forth?"

Stanton satisfied the sergeant by displaying letters and papers, after which the officer shook hands cordially, and departed.

LEFT alone, young Stanton found it hard to believe that the strange person who had been so much in his company aboard ship could be a corpse, in so short a time after their separation. It was several minutes before he realized that the murder of the Creole meant that he was in physical peril himself. If the girl had escaped with the bag—or if the gunman had secured it—Stanley Stanton, in all probability would have interested the criminals no longer. Perhaps, if he had permitted them to capture the prize, poor old Gautier would not have been run through with a dueling sword.

But Gautier was dead, and in Stanley's possession there were now two million francs. Whoever had killed the Creole could be depended upon to make another attempt to get the money; they probably wouldn't hesitate at murder of its present guardian.

Stanton drew out the note from the dead man. Conditions over which Gautier had no control had prevented him calling for his bag.—"Beware of thieves."—The girl and the scoundrel whom Stanley had disarmed and overpowered.—"Do not appeal to the police under any circumstances."

Did Gautier realize that he might

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lose his life, poor devil? Well, he was dead; and so what was Stanley Stanton to do with the two million francs? The sergeant had stated that Gautier had no heirs; that his famliy was extinct. Then to whom did this treasure belong?

Why, it was anybody's money! And possession was nine points of the law. —Why wasn't it his money? The girl had attempted to steal it. Failing that, she had sent a common crook after it. Wouldn't the old man have preferred that his chance acquaintance of the ship possess his fortune, rather than the people whom he distrusted?

One hundred thousand dollars! More than he could save in a lifetime—and worth fighting for. Probably his duty was to take it to the police, with a full account of how it came into his possession. But if there were no heirs, the fortune would go eventually to the state. Gautier could never have desired that.

STANLEY'S jaw grew rigid and his eyes snapped. Opportunity knocked. A fortune was in his grasp. If, and when, persons legally entitled to the Gautier cash presented themselves, he would deliver the money to them. He wasn't a thief. But if no legitimate claim was ever made, he would consider himself the heir to Gautier's fortune.

The thing to do, then, was to get out of New Orleans. Here, he was at a great disadvantage. Criminals knew that he had the money, and they wouldn't leave him very long in peace. It was now or never.

He leaped to the phone. When was the next train for New York? The porter informed him that a train was leaving in forty minutes.

He decided to leave behind his own bag, the large one which the girl had damaged. He would pay his bill in a hurry and vamoose, taking with him only the small black bag into which he was already repacking the money.

Nobody was keeping tabs on him in the corridor, so he whisked down to the floor below and took the elevator from there. He stepped out briskly toward the hotel desk and then he saw something which caused him to pause. Standing close to the cashier's cage was the tall, dark man who had worn the red-lined evening cape.

Stanley's legs took charge. He was out of the hotel and into a taxi in a jiffy. And after he had told the driver where to go, he realized that he had left without paying his hotel bill. Well, he would send the money.

If no one caught up with him before he boarded the train, he would rent a compartment and lock himself in it.

He kept looking back, and he saw plenty of traffic behind him but no evidence that he was being pursued.

In front of the station a redcap opened the taxi door.

"Yo' bag, suh?"

"No!" Stanton shouted.

Lifting the bag tenderly, he set it beside him on the sidewalk, and offered the chauffeur a five-dollar bill.

"Got anythin' smaller, suh?" asked the chauffeur.

"Guess so."

He thrust his hand into his pocket.

"Hey, boss! Yo' bag!" exclaimed the driver.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FLIGHT OF THE BLACK BAG.

STANTON glanced down. His black bag was gone. Ten feet away a big Negro was making off with the case and its contents.

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"Stop thief!" shouted Stanton wildly. "Drop that bag!"

He started in pursuit. But the man who had snatched his bag had no intention of being caught with it. A car had been parked at the curb, twenty feet behind the taxi which had delivered Stanley Stanton. Its rear door—it was a sedan—swung open, and the Negro made a forward pass of the suitcase, on a dead run, right through the opening. The door slammed. Immediately the car darted forward, and swung into the middle of the street. Framed by the car window, Stanton saw a familiar face; a beautiful face wearing a triumphant smile—the face of the girl he had spanked.

"Follow that car!" he cried to the driver of his own taxi.

"Get a cop, eh?" asked the chauffeur, as Stanley leaped into the cab.

"No, no! You overtake the car. I'll do the rest."

He patted his right-hand coat pocket, where reposed the thirty-two which he had taken from the daring young woman.

The car into which the thief had tossed Stanton's black bag was a small, cheap sedan. It was already a block away by the time the taxi got started. And though it was held up for a few seconds by a traffic signal on Canal Street, thus enabling the taxi to come within fifty feet of it, there was plenty of traffic on Canal Street, so that the sedan secured the advantage. But at the next traffic signal the car made a left turn into a narrow street of the French Quarter. When the taxi was able to follow, they saw the fugitive motorcar fully an eighth of a mile ahead, and traveling fast along a deserted street. Then it swung into a street lined with old houses, turned left again, and into a better district.

Stanley, leaning forward and gazing excitedly, uttered an exclamation of triumph, for apparently this was not a through street. Three or four blocks down, a big building cut it off.

However, his satisfaction was short lived, for the car stopped suddenly at the curb near the end of the street. Out of it whisked a woman who was carrying Stanton's black bag. She vanished into a building, as the taxi drew near, and the other car started forward, apparently intent upon ramming into the structure which blocked the street. At the last second, however, it turned sharply to the left on two wheels, and disappeared in what must have been an alley.

"Stop!" exclaimed Stanton. With a grinding of brakes, his taxi drew up in front of the residence into which the thief had disappeared. Stanton gave the driver a couple of dollars, and then turned to confront the hiding place of the girl criminal.

It was a solidly built house, with no windows upon the ground floor and a big heavy oak door in the center of the wall. The second story was an overhanging one with elaborately carved beams. There was a row of French windows, each with a balcony, and protected with closed green blinds.

STANTON foolishly turned the huge doorknob, but of course the door was locked. There was no way of getting up to the second story windows. The place was like a fortress. Besides, it was noon, and there were people on the sidewalks.

Away down the street he saw a policeman's uniform. All he had to do was call the officer. Only—he was outside the law. He couldn't set the police upon people who had stolen from him what he had been illegally retaining.

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Inside this house was a hundred thousand dollars which Stanley considered belonged to him, if it did to anybody. And yet he couldn't do anything about it. From behind the blinds of one of the windows that confounded girl was probably laughing at him at that moment.

He gritted his teeth; clenched his hands. Then he saw that there was a narrow alley between the house in which the girl had taken refuge and the building beyond. Perhaps he could obtain entrance from the back of the house.

He turned into the alley. It ran back a couple of hundred feet and into a narrow thoroughfare. Her refuge was on his left, a blank wall two stories high; but at the end of the building was a seven-foot wall, probably enclosing a garden. Stanley reached up and felt gingerly on top of the wall, for often there was broken glass imbedded in the cement of such affairs. None here.

He placed the flat of his hands on the flat top of the wall, leaped, and pulled his one hundred and seventy-five pounds up and over with ease. Stanton had the tremendous biceps of an oarsman.

He dropped into a large, pitifully neglected garden. The grass was two feet high, and mingled with weeds. There had been a fountain, but it was now empty and half filled with rubbish. He saw a round iron table and two iron chairs, very rusty and half buried in the tall grass.

The house was built in Spanish fashion, half way round the garden. If its exterior had been forbidding, viewed from the garden, it was a charming residence. There was a balcony all the way round the second story, to which a number of French windows gave exit. There was a staircase from the lower colonnade, which gave access to the second floor.

He saw that the street door did not admit to the house, but to an arched passage which conducted one into the *patio*. Evidently it once had been the home of wealthy Creoles, but long uninhabited. The windows were dirty, and some of the panes were broken. Grass was growing through cracks in the stone floor colonnade.

A vacant house, but the girl had entered it with his two million francs.

He stared in perplexity at the façade of the building, and then he was startled by a piercing scream—that of a woman—the girl. She was in trouble.

STANTON went up the staircase to the second floor in a few strides. The cry had come from above.

On the balcony he hesitated, and a second cry guided him. This time she shrieked something in a foreign tongue—French, he guessed, though he didn't understand the language. And she was in one of the rooms in the main building; the middle one, he thought.

Stanton's feet fell heavily upon the ancient planking. He paused in front of the middle window, in the main part of the house. He heard a man's voice rumble and then a scream.

He fumbled with the French window. Locked. He stepped back, and then he hurled himself against the ancient window frame.

With a crash, it gave way, and Stanley plunged into the room. For a second he became tangled in heavy crimson velour drapes which gave forth a cloud of dust, and then he was inside.

The girl stood in front of a big carved gilt table upon which stood the black bag, open. Thousand- and ten-thousand-franc notes were scattered about as if they had been pulled out of

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their coverings. A burly, mustached, evil-visaged person was standing behind the girl, gripping her tightly; while a second man, even more vicious, was twisting her right arm.

"Quit that!" shouted Stanley Stanton.

The fellow who had been torturing the girl dropped her and pulled a heavy revolver from a holster inside his coat.

Crash! Stanton had hit him with all his force—a wild swing, but terrific. It landed flush on the man's jaw, and he pitched over sidewise, his weapon slithering across the floor.

Stanley turned to face the second man who, with his left arm around the girl's waist, had drawn an automatic and was aiming it at the intruder, over her left shoulder.

But her two hands were free, and they lifted and fastened upon the hand which held the weapon. He fired, but the two bullets which escaped from the pistol went through the ceiling. And then Stanley Stanton dove at him, hurled him to the floor, pinned his right arm to the rug, kneeled on it and dug the pistol out of his grasp. The fellow had dragged the girl down with him, but she had torn herself loose.

"Look out!" she cried.

Stanley crashed the side of the weapon against his antagonist's forehead, scrambled like a cat to his feet, and would have received a bullet in his brain but for one thing. The first man had secured his revolver again, and still groggy, was on his knees, his left hand grasping the table to support him while he rested the barrel of his gun against its edge. The remarkable young woman had thrown herself against the table, tipping it over. The marksman missed, and went down with the heavy, old-fashioned table on top of him.

Stanton covered him with the automatic.

"Drop that gun!" he shouted.

But the fellow had crawled out from beneath the table, which stood on its side. Using it as a bulwark, he lifted his weapon again; and Stanton, who hesitated to shoot a man, even to save his own life, threw the automatic at him, savagely. It struck him between the eyes, and he went down. The table fell over upon him.

A CRACKLING string of French imprecations warned him. He turned.

The first man was up again and coming at him, his left arm out, his right hand clenched and resting on his breast—a boxer's position. Stanley swung at him, and received a blow in the stomach which all but drove the wind out of him. He outweighed the other fellow at least fifteen pounds, but the man knew how to fight, and Stanton had had little experience as a boxer.

Crack!—crack!—crack! The left to the nose; the right into the stomach again, and then a sizzling left hook. Stanton swayed, and then did the only thing he could do. He stretched out long arms and dragged the man into his embrace. His shoulders and arms were as powerful as a wrestler's; but he was a stranger to infighting, and his opponent withstood his bear's grip and slammed in solid rights and lefts to the body. Finally he broke the New Yorker's hold, backed away and began to pepper the young man. Stanley lunged and swung, and found his blows neatly blocked. One eye was closed, he was winded, and he wouldn't last long . . .

His mustached opponent's black eyes were sparkling with triumph. He let go a killing blow for the jaw, which Stanton was lucky enough to dodge.

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The man had put everything he had behind that blow and was off balance for a second—long enough for one of the boy's wild swings to crash into the side of his head. The man went down, and Stanton threw himself on top of him. Brute strength was now in a position to better science. *Smash, smash, smash!* went a number of pile-driver blows into the man's body. As each sank into the flesh, Stanton marveled that the fellow could retain consciousness and fight back; but he fought plenty.

For two or three minutes, so it seemed, the battle on the floor continued; but in the end, Stanton rose from the body of a game but senseless pugilist. And as he pulled himself away, the man's coat was pulled back and he saw to his consternation a silver shield. Police! He had been fighting with policemen.

"They're officers," he cried in dismay.

No answer.

He peered around. The girl had gone. And the bag and the scattered banknotes were also gone.

While he had been risking bullets, was being beaten by trained fists, that unprincipled girl had taken his money and vamoosed. She had left him with the officers who would drag him to jail. —Just what she hoped, no doubt.

HE stepped over to the man under the table. The man was out, and breathing loudly.

Filled with panic, Stanley Stanton darted through the open French window, rushed around the balcony to the staircase, hot-footed it across the garden, went over the wall, and ran like a frightened fawn down the alley and to the narrow thoroughfare at the back.

There were people walking in this twelve-foot street with its old-fashioned cobblestones, and he had sense enough to slow to a walk. Expecting each second to hear sounds of pursuit behind him, he walked to the end of the street and entered a wider one. A taxi came jogging along; he hailed it and sank exhausted on the cushions.

"Where to?" demanded the driver.

"Southern Pacific Railroad Station," he stammered.

They would be after him in a minute or two. The taxi man would report picking up a bruised and disheveled person.

He would take another cab at the station and go back to the hotel.

Stanley Stanton was a law-abiding young man. Even in his college days, he had never fought with a policeman. But these fellows were foreign looking individuals, not in uniform, and they had been talking French. How was he to know who they were? They had been torturing the girl—though of course she deserved torture, and worse.

To take to her heels with his money, after the way he had battled for her! She was laughing at him, probably; was glad that he would be sent to prison. Damn her!

Yet she was so pretty—so audacious. And she certainly had saved his life, when she tipped the table over on the officer. Fighting for her own interests, of course.

Stanton swore softly. He hated to let her win in the conflict between them. It wasn't so much the money. He had never really hoped that he would be able to hold a fortune which certainly was not his property. It was a personal grudge now.

Of course, he must pack his bag and get out of New Orleans as fast as possible. He'd better hire a motor to take him to some other state. All railroad

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stations would be watched. Naturally, these cops were foreign looking, and they talked French. Lots of the New Orleans detectives must be Frenchmen.

With a squealing of brakes the cab came to a stop in front of the station. Stanton paid the man, and walked away. Better walk to his hotel, because a second taxi might be traced.

He straightened his collar and necktie. Aside from that punch in the eye, he hadn't been marred much. A little cut on his upper lip, but it had already stopped bleeding. To-morrow, no doubt, he would have a black eye. Still, he might get up to his room without attracting attention. . . .

Apparently, nobody noticed him as he crossed the lobby. The Negro on the elevator didn't pay any attention to him. He inserted his key in the door, and opened it.

Stanton stiffened, stared, put his hand wearily to his forehead. Surely he was seeing things!

CHAPTER VII.

A YOUNG LADY MAKES A CALL.

THE girl was sitting in a chair beside his window, serenely smoking a cigarette.

"Good day!" she remarked, blandly. "Won't you come in?"

"Of all the nerve!" he spluttered. "How dare you come back here? Where's my property?"

"Don't stand there like an idiot!" she said with an amused smile. "Sit down. I want to talk to you."

Stanley turned, locked the door, and put the key in his pocket.

"I want to talk to *you*," he said grimly, "and this time you won't get out until we have a settlement."

She crushed her cigarette upon an ash tr. , crossed her legs, and embraced her knee with clasped hands. She was a serene as though she was not in a r an's room, with the door locked; an there was satisfaction in the black eyes which contemplated him.

"I hate you dreadfully," she said in her charming drawl. "I hoped that something very horrible would happen to you. I was awfully mad, but now I'm not."

"How you feel is not of the least importance. If you came here to gloat over me, you may find that the game isn't over yet."

Her smile was so bewitching that Stanley, who had a thousand reasons for despising her, found it difficult to remain indignant.

"I had to thank you," she said sweetly. "You are very brave, and you have certainly performed a great service for me. I couldn't stop at the time to tell you how I felt about it; but I knew you'd come back here, so I dropped in . . ."

"While I was fighting with two officers who had been maltreating you," he said reproachfully, "you ran off with my money."

"But I waited until I was sure you would win. Besides, it isn't your money."

"Where is it? You'll tell me before you leave this room."

She laughed in his face.

"I'm not scared of you, Mr. Stanton," she told him coolly. "Oh, Sam!" she called.

The door of Stanley's bathroom opened. Into the chamber stepped a very tall and primitive looking black man. In his right hand was a heavy Navy revolver. It was the Negro who had snatched the bag at the station. He grinned from ear to ear.

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"Y-a-a-s, missie?" he inquired, in a deep, resonant bass.

"I just wanted this person to see you, Sam," she said with an aggravating laugh. "In case, Mr. Stanton, you thought of—er—chastising me again, I brought this boy along."

"Thoughtful of you!" he mumbled, sarcastically.

Unruffled, she continued:

"You're a Yankee tourist, and you hadn't ought to mess up in what don't concern you," she said, pleasantly. "And so far as you are concerned, the whole matter is closed."

"Oh, is it?"

She smiled.

"But I certainly did admire you for the way you lit into those brutes! And I wouldn't want anything to happen to you, because you didn't mean any harm, and you're sort of nice. So I decided that I would give you two ten-thousand-franc notes and ask you to take the next train No'th."

Stanley's hands clenched tightly.

"You're sublime!" he assured her. "Are you alone in this affair?"

"I represent very pow'ful people, Mr. Stanton."

"Well, I've a poor opinion of powerful people who would let a chit of a girl do their dirty work."

She grew very red.

"Don't you go to get so nasty!" she warned. "You haven't any call to mingle in our affairs at all. So you take this money—"

She fumbled in her purse.

STANLEY jumped up and stood over her.

"None of that!" he said angrily. "You listen to me. That money was given to me by its owner. He is dead.

"If he proves to have no heirs, I shall consider that it rightfully belongs to me.—At least, I have a better title to it than you have. And so I'm going to get it back."

Her eyes sparkled, and her smile was ironic.

"You're an awful fool, Mr. Stanton.—Sam!"

"Y-a-a-s, missie."

"Make the gentleman give you the key of the door."

Sam advanced on Stanley with a ponderous tread. He held his left hand out, palm open, to receive the key, and he wagged the revolver in his right, menacingly.

"After you have left, I shall go at once to the police," Stanton warned the girl.

"Yo done heerd what de missie said," boomed the Negro.

The Northerner eyed the brute appraisingly. He was quite sure that the girl would not let the black boy kill, but Sam could overpower an ordinary man with one hand.

In this case, discretion was the better part of valor, and Stanton therefore passed over the key.

"After we have left, you may do what you please," she replied, to his threat. "But, of course, you won't get the money at all, if you go to the police."

The door closed behind them.

Stanton stood disconsolately in the middle of the room. What could he do? He was in a strange city; his prospects of laying hands on Gautier's fortune once more were negligible. If he went to the police, his information might be valuable in hunting down Gautier's murderer, but it would mean the surrender of his rights to Gautier's money. Which rights might be questionable but seemed to be infinitely better than those of the audacious young

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woman in whose possession the mass of French banknotes at present rested.

Suppose the odds were all against him—the game wasn't over yet. In his opinion she was playing a lone hand. It wasn't in the least likely that she represented powerful interests. Maybe she had a moral, if not a legal, right to the money; but she would have to convince him before he would leave her in unchallenged possession of it.

He tore open the door. Away down the corridor he saw the girl and her giant henchman step into the elevator and descend. When the car returned to his floor, he was waiting for it.

"The young lady you just took down," he said to the operator. "Do you happen to know who she is? She dropped her handkerchief."

"Yas, suh," replied the darkey, grinning broadly. "Guess I know Miss Mary Lou Regnier.—Her family just about founded this hyar town."

"Know where she lives?"

"Over in the Old Town. I don't just remember de name of de street."

"Much obliged."

He strode to the telephone desk and seized a phone book. There were half a page of Regniers. Discomfited, he crossed to the hotel desk.

"Do you happen to know where Miss Mary Louise Regnier lives?" he inquired.

"No sir. But you'll undoubtedly find it in the Blue Book."

He handed the New Yorker the New Orleans Blue Book. Nervously, Stanton turned the pages. Eureka! She was there—a granddaughter, and only child of Maurice Regnier, 43 Uhfe Street.

Stanley was naturally elated. Certainly she was not a professional thief, and was totally unused to intrigue. A decent impulse must have brought her to his room to thank him for coming to her rescue. The Negro she had brought along in case Stanton behaved badly, but it had not occurred to her that such a beautiful and aristocratic young woman might easily be traced.

CHAPTER VIII.

STANLEY CALLS ON THE YOUNG LADY.

IN the Vieux Carré, the old rectangle to the southwest of Canal Street and bounded by the river, Canal, Rampart and Esplande Streets, the tourist who wanders about finds a few historic edifices, blinks at the forbidding façades of ancient residences, pokes through a few narrow lanes, and thinks he has seen the old city. Very few, like Stanley Stanton, have penetrated into the interior of an old mansion.

The streets bear Spanish and French names. The Spaniard speaks in the iron lattices and stuccoed walls, in the arches, gratings, great locks and hinges which once made every house a fortress. Where the pedestrian's eyes cannot penetrate are the charming inner courts with parterres, urns and basins, fountains, fine statues half hidden in roses and vines.

From the streets, those residences which are tenanted are hard to distinguish from those whose owners have long since moved to the spacious suburbs, for the windows are all shuttered, and the stuccoed walls need paint.

Some of the old families still cling to their ancestral halls of the Vieux Carré, and among them are the Regniers, the first of whom was the lieutenant of Bienville who founded New Orleans. They have never blended their blood with that of Spaniard or Anglo-Saxon, and until the present

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generation, they have sent their sons and daughters to France to be educated.

Even had the Regniers retained their ancient fortune, they would not have followed the example of other French families and moved from their old home. But as things were, they could not move, nor could they keep the place in repair.

Maurice Regnier had trusted his affairs to a false friend, a generation back. The man had lost Regnier funds in speculation, and had fled from the wrath of his patron. Yet it was typical of Maurice that he had accepted his loss and made no charges against him. However, he had taken an oath to slay the scoundrel if their paths ever crossed again. Since then, the family lived meagerly. Mary Lou, the only daughter, had to forego the Paris convent and obtained her education in the public schools of New Orleans, where she made the acquaintance of American boys and girls of her own age and had acquired American instead of French views on men and life.

Half an hour after she had left Stanton raging impotently in his chamber, the remarkable young woman emerged from a taxi with her huge black retainer, placed a key in the lock of a high oak door in an arched doorway, and entered the hallway of the Regnier home, the parquet of which squeaked and quivered with age. She crossed to an opposite exit, and stepped into a garden where the sun shone brightly upon shrubs and brilliantly colored flowers, where there was the soft splash of water falling from the mouth of a dolphin into a small marble fountain, and where an old man sat in a *chaise longue,* his head thrown back, his mouth open, his eyes closed. He was in a dressing gown of red. He was dark and striking. Obviously, he was ill.

MARY LOU REGNIER bent over him, but did not wake him.

She turned, ascended a staircase which led to the second floor balcony, and went into her own room. On the floor was a faded French carpet of red and gold. The bed was French in style, with a heavy satin canopy, faded. The chairs were clumsy French Empire, and the bureau and dressing table were solid affairs of yellow and gold. Six generations of Regnier women had slept in this room, but Mary Lou's grandfather had declared that none were as beautiful as the present occupant.

The girl locked her door, crossed to a closet, unlocked it, and drew forth the black bag. She opened it and dumped upon the lace coverlet of the bed its paper contents. With a sigh of deep satisfaction, she began the delightful labor of counting. It took her longer than it had taken Stanley Stanton, but she achieved the same total. She lifted her face, which the sunlight fell upon. She smiled ecstatically.

"We are rich!" she exclaimed. "Rich!"

She thrust her two hands into the mass of bank notes, tossing them about like a child at play. Then she repacked them, methodically, and replaced them in the bag, which she again locked in her closet. And at that moment she became aware of voices below.

She opened the door of her room and stepped out upon the balcony.

Sam had conducted two men into the *patio.* Heavy, solid men with hard, solemn faces they were. One of them placed his hand rudely upon the shoulder of the sleeping individual, who started and opened his eyes.

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"Maurice Regnier," the fellow said loudly. "I arrest you for the murder of Alphonse Gautier."

Mary Lou leaned over the balcony rail. "Stop!" she cried. "You must not touch my grandfather. He is ill."

She rushed down the staircase and threw herself like a whirlwind upon the officers.

"Now, now, lady!" said one of them. "We have a warrant here. You must not interfere."

"It's all right, child," said the old man. "They can't hold me upon such a preposterous charge.—Give me your arm, Sam."

The group moved into the building, and no sooner had the garden become vacant than a young man pulled himself lightly over the wall at the bottom and landed on the soft grass. Bending double, he moved swiftly to the staircase, which the girl had just descended. A couple of seconds later, he pushed open the door from which he had seen her emerge, and pulled open the closet door.

Upon the floor, just inside, Stanley Stanton saw the black bag. He opened it, nodded with satisfaction, and as swiftly as he had entered, the amateur burglar departed.

The long garden was still empty. Successfully, Stanton negotiated the rear wall, and swinging the black bag he strode down the alley until he came to a thoroughfare. He was beaming with triumph.

"Now, Miss Mary Lou Regnier," he said under his breath, "maybe you'll call again, with a few explanations."

AS his taxi approached the Carlos Hotel he observed, directly across the street, the marble façade of the Crescent and State Bank, and he had an inspiration.

"Stop at the bank," he told the taxi man.

At the right, just inside the entrance there was a staircase which led down to the vaults. He plunged down it, and was confronted by an attendant.

"I want to rent a large safety deposit box," he stated.

"Certainly, sir. Please sit down.—Big enough to hold that bag?"

"Yes. If possible."

"We have boxes large enough to hold a trunk."

Blanks were furnished Stanton, and he filled them out and signed his name with a flourish. After that, he was conducted into the vault, and was supplied with a large steel box into which he placed Gautier's black suitcase.

With a sigh of profound satisfaction, he saw the treasure locked up. The electrically operated grating of the vault chamber slid open, and he passed into the anteroom. There he had his second inspiration.

"Give me a couple of envelopes, please—and a stamp. No, two stamps."

When they were supplied, he placed his deposit box keys inside one of the envelopes, folded it, and inserted it inside the second envelope, which he sealed. After that, he wrote his name and his New York address on the envelope; and as he left the bank building he dropped the stamped envelope in the mail box.

So far as thieves were concerned, he was now safe. If the police found out about the treasure and demanded it, of of course, he would give it up; but he hoped they wouldn't find out. And he was now in an impregnable position to negotiate with Mary Lou Regnier, whom he expected to put in an appearance very shortly.

Stanton, from the rear of the garden, had heard none of the remarks

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which had brought Mary Lou flying from her room and which had emptied the garden of its occupants. He had simply seen an opportunity, and he had taken advantage of it.

A mighty weight lifted from his shoulders. He was about to enter the hotel, when a heavy hand fell upon his shoulder.

"I want you," declared a harsh voice.

He looked into the face of the officer upon whom he had used his fists so skillfully, and whom he finally had knocked unconscious in the empty house.

The man turned back his coat lapel and revealed a silver shield. A second man, the other victim of Stanton's fists, grasped the New Yorker's left arm. Resistance did not even occur to the young man. The problem of the identity of the audacious young woman had caused him to forget that he had assaulted officers of the law, that his suitcases had been left in the empty house, and that there were a few letters and papers in it which would identify him. He remembered now.

"Get into this taxi," the first officer commanded, gruffly.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PROFESSOR AND HIS PETS.

THE taxi started off. Stanton sat between the two men. He was thankful they didn't feel it necessary to handcuff him.

One of them addressed him in French, and received a blank look; whereupon he began a conversation with his companion in the same language which lasted for some minutes. The taxi turned left on Canal Street, rolled rapidly across the railroad tracks, and then sped through a region of small, tumbledown shacks and empty streets. Being unacquainted with New Orleans, the New Yorker was not aware that they were passing through a once infamous district, now abandoned. This section was succeeded by a region of Negro cabins on unpaved streets, and finally the machine entered open but disheveled looking country.

Not until then did Stanton become suspicious.

"Look here," he demanded. "Where are you taking me?"

Instead of replying, the man on his right drew a revolver from a shoulder holster and jabbed it into the prisoner's ribs.

"You'll find out soon enough," he said shortly.

"You're police officers, aren't you?" Stanton demanded anxiously.

The fellow said something in French to his friend, and both laughed. Stanley reached up and deftly turned back the speaker's coat lapel. The badge was that of a deputy sheriff.

"Keep your hands still, or I'll drill you!" growled the deputy. Stanton cursed his own guilelessness. He knew several men in New York who had been given deputy sheriff badges merely in return for campaign contributions—men who used them to escape the attention of traffic officers, and who had no connection with the police. He wasn't under arrest. These crooks were taking him to an out-of-the-way place for some sinister purpose.

The car was moving along beside a high wall encircling a country estate, and suddenly it turned right, through a gateway. It passed along a gravel road which crossed swampy ground from which grew moss oaks and cypresses. Tree branches, overhanging the road, made the spot a dismal one. In a few

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seconds, the car left the swamp behind and crossed a stretch of thick, lush grass beyond which was a large white house whose front was ornamented by white pillars.

The road now circled around a pond about a hundred feet in diameter, upon which were floating a dozen thick logs. Suddenly one of those logs moved. A hideous head lifted, and huge jaws opened wide to reveal a cavernous mouth lined with sharp white teeth—an alligator—the grandfather of alligators, to judge by his appearance. Stanley, who had never seen an alligator except in a cage, shuddered. His captors noticed it and laughed.

"He ain't tasted white meat for a long time," one of them remarked significantly, in English.

As the car swung under a porte-cochère Stanley saw the grass near the edge of the pond being violently agitated, and then a twelve-foot 'gator emerged from it and plunged into the pool.

The man on his right opened the door of the taxi, stepped out on the path, and motioned to Stanley Stanton to alight.

He stepped out, very white and weak in the knees.

He went up three steps to a broad veranda, closely escorted, and then the front door was opened by a black man in livery. The prisoner entered a wide hallway, with rooms opening at left and right, and a staircase rising at the left to a balcony which ran around the hall. It was an old-fashioned plantation house, the sort of thing Stanton had seen in motion pictures of life in the South before the War. At another time, he might have visualized beautiful women in crinolines and men in Confederate gray thronging this establishment; but he was thinking of the hideous aspect of the giant alligators, unguarded, in the pool without.

ONE of his captors knocked on a door at the right, and then opened it.

"Go in there," he commanded.

Stanley entered a small room which contained a desk, a bookcase and two wooden chairs. There was no one in the room.

In a moment, however, there crossed the threshold a tall man whose hair was snow white, but whose bushy eyebrows were jet black and whose great black eyes protruded noticeably. His nose was large and hooked, and his mouth was lean, his thin lips were bloodless. His skin was dark, and his general effect was sinister. He was the man who had worn the crimson-lined opera cape the night before, and who had been talking with the hotel clerk a few hours back.

"Young man," said the white-haired man in a deep bass voice and a pompous tone, "permit me to introduce myself—Jules Lemaire, Professor Jules Lemaire. As a child, you undoubtedly saw me in Ringling's Circus.—'The Bravest of the Brave,' was my billing. 'The only man who dares enter a pool filled with man-eating reptiles.'—At any event, you must have seen and heard my pets as you approached my mansion."

"How do you do?" replied Stanton, uncertainly. He was forced to smile, despite his serious situation, over the fellow's grandiloquent manner.

"Very well, thank you."

Lemaire seated himself, and a smirk intended to be benevolent distorted his saturnine countenance.

"Young man," he remarked. "You have in your possession a very large sum of money which was entrusted to

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you by the late Alphonse Gautier.—Hearing of the lamentable death of my old friend Gautier, you attempted to appropriate that money. That was wrong of you."

"You are mistaken, sir. I intended to hold it until I discovered who was legally entitled to it."

THE professor wagged his head.

"Permit me to doubt that. Your actions belie your words. Gautier was my messenger, Mr. Stanton. He carried to France some gold coin belonging to me. He purchased francs with it, and he was bringing back my money when, observing a Federal secret service agent upon the levee, he placed the bag which contained it in your care.

"I met him at the levee, and we dined together. This morning we were going to call upon you together and reclaim the property. Unfortunately, my friend yielded to a sentimental impulse and revisited his ancestral home, late last night. He was murdered.—But you realize the position in which I am placed?

"The whole transaction was illegal. The gold was the reward of my labors as a circus performer—my entire fortune. Why, then, should I turn it over to the government for a dollar of uncertain value? By turning it into francs, I have already made a profit of thirty per cent."

"Very interesting," commented Stanton. "No doubt you have something in Gautier's handwriting to back up your statement?"

The man smiled serenely.

"Unfortunately, I have not. Which explains why I was forced to arrange this interview with you."

He gazed expectantly at Stanton, who shrugged his shoulders.

"Look here," said Stanley. "If you have a legal right to Gautier's money, go to the police and have me arrested."

"Oh, but I have a better method," replied Lemaire, scowling. "Give me the keys to the vault in the Crescent Bank which you rented a few minutes before my fools laid hands on you."

"What makes you think—?"

"Every move you have made since you left the ship has been reported to me. A steward in my pay saw you carry the black bag fom the Regnier house to the bank. You took a taxicab, and my men almost had their hands on you when you entered the bank."

"I haven't the keys," said Stanley nervously. "They are not in my possession now."

"If you have given them to Regnier, I swear I'll throw you to my pets!" bellowed the alligator man.

"Wait!" pleaded Stanley. "So far as I know, that bag was the property of Mr. Gautier. I put it in a safety deposit vault, and I mailed the keys to my attorney in New York. You will only have to prove ownership of the money, and he will turn them over to you."

"Turn out your pockets."

Stanton obeyed, and placed on the desk his money, his watch, and two or three papers which had been in his breast pocket, including the letter from Gautier.

Upon the latter Lemaire pounced eagerly. As he read, he gnashed his teeth, and his black eyes glittered like those of a snake about to strike.

"YOU have had no opportunity to dispose of them," he muttered, "so you may truly have mailed the keys from the bank.—Well, so much the worse for you!"

He rang a bell on his desk, where-

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upon the black man entered. Lemaire, addressed him in French. A few seconds later, the Negro returned with the pair who had brought Stanton from New Orleans.

"You will go with them," stated Lemaire. "Later, we shall talk again."

There was nothing to do but accompany the trio.

The Negro led the way down the hall, opened a door beneath the staircase, and started down a steep flight of stone steps.

Stanley followed, the two white rascals bringing up the rear.

They arrived in a huge cellar, crossed it, and the black man unlocked a door on the far side. Stanley had a glimpse of a compartment half filled with kegs and cases; and then he was pushed into it and the door was slammed and locked. As there was no window in the place, which he rightly assumed to be a wine cellar, he stumbled over barrels and boxes and finally found a seat upon an upturned keg.

He was badly frightened, but he was thankful that he had mailed the keys of the deposit vault. If the crazy brute, Lemaire, who permitted full grown alligators to crawl freely about his estate, had secured the vault keys, Stanley had a notion that he would have fed their owner to his 'gators.

With two million francs at stake, Lemaire wasn't likely to permit the man to whom Gautier had entrusted the treasure to go free. The situation now was not without hope. Lemaire would have to make a deal; and under the circumstances, Stanley would not hesitate to give up the treasure. It was not his money, and Gautier had no known heirs.

If Lemaire killed Stanley, his prospects of touching the contents of the safe were lost unless he could prove a legal right to them. And that was a comforting thought.

CHAPTER X.

TWO IN A WINE CELLAR.

IT was dark in the vault, and there was an aroma of wine which caused Stanton to become drowsy.

An hour passed. He slid off the keg upon the floor, and dropped off to sleep.

Much later, he was awakened by the rattle of the big lock on the door. He sat up, rubbed his eyes, and stiffened with apprehension. The door opened. The outer cellar also was dark.

He heard a slight scuffle and then a half-choked cry as somebody was thrust into the wine cellar. The door shut with a bang; the key turned in it. Then somebody stepped upon Stanley's ankle. A woman screamed shrilly.

"It's all right," he said quickly. "You just stepped on my leg."

"You!" cried a familiar voice.

"Miss Regnier!" he exclaimed. "Oh, I'm sorry!"

The indomitable girl actually laughed.

"I'm glad it's some one human," she declared. "I was afraid it was one of those horrible 'gators.—Is there any place to sit down?"

"There's a keg here," he replied. "This way. Please give me your hand. —Did you trail me here, Miss Regnier?"

"You flattah yo'self," she said haughtily. "How do you even know my name?"

"I found out. You must admit you have been on my heels," he said.

Her hand touched his sleeve, and then her nails dug into his arm.

"Was it you or this scoundrel who took advantage of my distress and stole the bag from my chamber?"

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"It was I, but I didn't know anything about your distress."

"My grandfather—" she said piteously. "They have arrested him. They accuse him of killing Gautier."

"Was that what was happening?"

"O' co'se he didn't! He was wounded, but he left Gautier unhurt. For thirty years my grandfather had been waiting for Mr. Gautier to come back. You don't understand. Gautier was a thief. My grandfather trusted him, and he stole all our money. All my life we have been dirt poor. They may have fought—the police say grandfather has a wound in his shoulder. But he didn't tell me. I thought it was a heart attack."

"If I'd known, I wouldn't have done what I did," said Stanton, contritely. "It was a game. I couldn't let you beat me."

"I don't care about the money now. —Where is it?"

"In a safety deposit vault. And I've mailed the keys to New York. But if you can show me—"

"Then he can't lay his fingers on it," she exclaimed. "Thank God fo' that!"

"I can't understand why a young lady should turn thief."

"Then I'll tell you," she said sharply. "All my life I've been hearing about this traitor Gautier. The other day, grandfather told me he had heard that Gautier was returning to New Orleans on the steamer, with a fortune in French francs. There was even a piece about him in the paper. 'His debt to me is outlawed,' grandfather told me, 'but he will meet me, or I'll brand him as a coward!'

"WHEN the ship came in, I was on the levee. I wanted to see the face of the man who had ruined the Regniers. Somehow I missed him, but I saw you as you came ashore. I had turned to leave, when I heard voices a few feet from me, on the other side of a pile of cotton bales. Gautier's name made me listen.

"'Gautier had a small black bag in the ship's strong box,' said somebody with an English accent—a steward, I suppose. 'I saw a passenger named Stanton carrying it from Gautier's stateroom to his own, after the ship docked.'—'Gautier must have spotted the chief, then. I told him not to come here,' exclaimed the other man. 'What does this Stanton look like? Where did he go.'—'He's blond, good-looking, and he told a taxi driver to take him to the Carlos Hotel.'—'Good! We'll have that bag in an hour!'—

"Then they moved away.—Mr. Stanton, I considered it my money, and somebody was going to steal it from you. Didn't I have a better right to it than the other thief?"

"I'll say you did!"

"Our old housekeeper was head chambermaid at the Carlos. I could get a passkey from her. So I went there — and you caught me — and spanked me!" she added bitterly. "I went back next morning with Sam. I saw you come out with your suitcase. I knew there was a train leaving soon on the Southern Pacific, and Sam and I beat you there."

"Gosh, you took chances!"

"I looked back, and saw that your taxi was following my car. I had the key to the old Gautier house. We—er—we are agents for it—I told you we were very poor.—I thought I would throw you off the trail if I went in that old house and left by the garden, entering our own house by the back way."

"But Gautier had been killed there. How could you—?"

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"I didn't know, then. I hadn't read a paper. I only learned that he was dead when they arrested grandfather."

"Then—?"

"Grandfather told me what happened, when I went to see him at the jail. He had phoned the steamship company and learned that Gautier had arrived, and then he found that he had gone to the Roosevelt Hotel. He put on his best clothes and called at the hotel. They told him that Gautier was in the dining room.

"As grandfather was about to march right up to his table, Gautier rose and came toward the exit with another man. Grandfather says it was Professor Lemaire, who is a very wicked man. Grandfather says he is suspected of being the leader of a Louisiana dope ring, and that in all probability Gautier was his agent abroad. Anyway, they had been having dinner together.

"Grandfather slapped Gautier's cheek with his glove. That's how a duel starts, you know. After all, Gautier is a Creole, and he had to fight. He proposed that they meet at midnight in the old Gautier residence, which had been vacant for years."

"Go on."

It seemed to Stanley that he was listening to a tale from the Eighteenth Century.

"Well, grandfather got out of the house without my knowledge, and they fought. If grandfather hadn't been so old, he would have run the rascal through. But—but he only wounded the poor old man—Gautier—so he couldn't continue. Grandfather came home—bleeding, though I didn't know it. He called the family doctor and had the wound dressed. And this morning he just told me that he wasn't feeling well. My grandfather is very brave. So you see, he didn't kill Monsieur Gautier at all. I'm sure they can't do anything to him."

"You're sure he told you exactly what happened?"

"If grandfather had slain this embezzler, I know he would have said so," she declared. "In all his long life, he has never lied!—It is all such a mystery, and—"

"NO mystery at all," contradicted Stanton. "Don't you worry about your grandfather, Miss Regnier. It's as plain as day. Gautier did not expect to encounter Lemaire. When he saw him on the pier, he feared robbery, which is why he put the bag in my charge. But he pretended to be friends with Lemaire—he must have, if they dined together.—

"Now, you say that your grandfather challenged Gautier when they met at the hotel. Well, Lemaire was present, and he saw his opportunity. I'll bet he was hidden in the Gautier house during the duel, and that he had his thugs with him. After your grandfather left, Lemaire showed himself. Probably he tried to force Gautier to write an order to me to turn over the money. And when Gautier refused—maybe Gautier attacked him. He had his sword. Anyway, Gautier was killed."

"Oh, I'm sure you're right!"

"Well, your grandfather was Gautier's enemy—they had fought. Lemaire fixed things to make it look as though Mr. Regnier had killed Gautier. Though I don't understand what became of the other sword, and I can't understand why Lemaire's men were lurking in the house this morning. It will be all right, though. We'll clear your grandfather."

"Y-es," she said dubiously. "Only Lemaire has us locked up down here."

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"We'll get away, somehow.—You haven't told me how you came to be here, Miss Regnier."

"I was taken right out of my house. Sam was at the jail, with my grandfather."

"It was sporting of you to make that last call on me at the hotel. Didn't you realize that the hotel people knew you?—I had no trouble finding your address."

"I had to thank you, you see—even if you had spanked me! It was rotten to run away, during that fight, but I didn't go till I saw you winning. And I took Sam to the hotel because you might be nasty. You'd have had a right to be.—I'm awfully glad you put the money in the vault. They surely would have found it in my room; they searched the place from top to bottom."

"Well—"

He broke off because there was a rattle of the key in the lock. When the door opened, the black servant was revealed, and with him were Stanley's friends the "deputy sheriffs."

CHAPTER XI.

A DREADFUL DEMONSTRATION.

"MARSE LEMAIRE says for yo' folks to come out of dar," declared the darkey.

"The zero hour!" commented Stanley.

He offered his hand to the girl, who clung to it.

"Before anything happens, I want to say that I'm sorry about—er—what happened in my room the first time."

She looked up at him with brimming eyes.

"I reckon I deserved it," she confessed. "I was so scared that I was brash. I'm always saucy when I'm frightened. But I'm not afraid of this old scoundrel!"

The prisoners ascended the stairs, hand in hand, and followed the Negro into Lemaire's office.

The alligator man was standing behind his desk. He bowed most politely to the young woman.

"Miss Regnier," he said. "I regret deeply that it was necessary to bring you here."

"You will regret it more, sir," she said haughtily.

"I must take that risk. Sit down, please. And you, Mr. Stanton."

"I prefer to stand, sir," the girl said stiffly.

Stanley, who already was completely infatuated with her, glowed with admiration for her spirit. She gave him more courage.

He did not share her confidence that Lemaire was helpless. The man knew what he was about.

"I shall be brief," said the professor. "Mr. Stanton, you will write an order that your safety deposit box be broken open and contents delivered to bearer."

"Don't you do it, Mr. Stanton!" cried the girl. "He can't make you!"

Lemaire grinned wickedly.

"Miss Regnier has been brought here to act as my messenger. You will make out the order to read that the box be delivered to her."

"I won't take it! I won't do it!" she exclaimed. "What right have you to this money?"

Lemaire laughed.

"The late Mr. Gautier was a dope merchant," he said. "As our business had been abandoned, and as there is now no way of connecting me with it, I shall confide to you that we were in partnership. He was bringing me my share of the cash profits."

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"I liked your other explanation best," Stanton said, mockingly.

"I am merely telling you this to make you realize that I have no scruples," he retorted.

"You're up against it, Lemaire," declared Stanton coolly. "If you kill me, the contents of the vault will go into litigation. Therefore I shall make you a proposition. Release us both, and in the morning I will go in person to the bank, have the vault broken open, and deliver to you fifty per cent of the contents. The other fifty per cent goes to Miss Regnier, whose grandfather was defrauded by Gautier thirty years ago."

"So you are interested in the young lady, eh?" sneered the self-confessed rascal.

STANTON turned and gazed boldly into Mary Lou's flushed countenance.

"Yes, I love her," he said, simply.

The girl quivered, grew pale, and her eyes filled with tears.

She stretched out her hands appealingly.

"After all I've done to you—Stan—Mr. Stanley?" she whispered.

"You haven't done anything except show me that you're the finest girl—"

Unconscious of Lemaire, they took a step toward each other; and then they became aware of loud sardonic laughter.

"Superb!" exclaimed Lemaire. And turning to his men he ordered, "Take the girl instead of the man."

Men crowded into the room. The Negro seized Mary Lou and whisked her outside. One of Lemaire's rascals thrust the muzzle of a gun against Stanton's stomach.

"You wait right here, *monsieur!*" he growled.

"What are they doing to her? Where have they taken her?" Stanton shouted distractedly.

"Silence!" commanded Stanton's guard.

Lemaire had followed the Negro and the girl from the office. He bellowed something in French, from outside the house; and immediately Stanton's captor grasped the young man by the collar with his left hand and prodded him in the back with his weapon. He pushed him out of the room, across the hall, and out upon the veranda.

There was a bright light under the porte-cochère, and it illuminated the grounds as far as the pond. Driven into the earth twenty feet beyond the driveway, was a stake; and there, chained to the stake, was Mary Lou Regnier.

Lemaire stood at the top of the porch steps. He turned and scowled at the New Yorker as he was brought out.

"You love each other, it appears," he sneered. "Well, Mr. Stanton, you need not sign the order. You will go to the bank in person with my men, have the safety deposit box broken open, and return to me with the money. The young woman will be hostage for your good behavior. Should you fail to obey orders—let me give you a demonstration of my powers. Watch him, you men!——

THE fellow who had forced Stanton out of the office released his collar and stepped to his left, the gun pressed against the prisoner's side. The other "deputy sheriff" stepped close to Stanley, on his right. Accompanied by the Negro, Lemaire descended to the middle of the driveway and stood there, illumined by the overhead light.

He raised his arms above his head,

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and lifted his voice in a croaking, honking cry; a voice that was strangely penetrating, savage and horrible.

Stanton heard a great splash in the pond. His hair stood on end. Chills ran up and down his spine. Mary Lou's eyes were fixed on him piteously, but she seemed too frightened to make an outcry.

Lemaire's call died away, but it was echoed from the pool.

Stanton glanced desperately from left to right. Both his captors were staring, fascinated. And suddenly there appeared inside the outer circle of light, and at the brink of the pool, a huge, hideous head with enormous yawning jaws—a gigantic alligator.

Mary Lou saw it, too, and emitted a piercing shriek.

Exultantly, the madman's call was repeated.

Stanton clenched his hands. His nails bit the flesh, and then—with both hands he grasped the barrel of the revolver that was in the hand of the man beside him, and tore it loose. The fellow bellowed, but the next second his shout became a cry of anguish, with the crack of the weapon and the entrance of a bullet into his breast.

Stanton sprang back, and fired point-blank at his other guard, who was in the act of drawing his gun.

Lemaire's barbaric cry broke off. He whirled, his right hand at his hip, and with savage joy Stanley Stanton, mild-mannered conventional city advertising man, emptied the weapon into the body of the man who talked to his alligator pets.

All three men were down. The Negro was running across the lawn.

Stanton leaped across the driveway, rushed over to the girl at the stake, and stepped in front of her. Wildly, he leveled his empty revolver at a creature whose tough hide could not even be penetrated by a bullet from an elephant gun.

The creature was halfway up on the bank, croaking fearsomely; but the bright light puzzled it, and he no longer heard the call of his master. His mighty tail thrashed the surface of the pond. For a second, it seemed as if he debated whether he ought to advance into the light and attack the helpless pair in front of him. And then he backed slowly into the water and sank into the depths of the pool.

Stanton fumbled with the chain until he found the fastening; released Mary Lou, who fell unconscious in his arms. He carried her into the house, stepping over the body of Jules Lemaire as he crossed the driveway. He was breathing heavily, shaking with excitement, but strangely he felt not the slightest qualm at the thought that he had just killed or wounded three human beings, he did not know which . . .

MARY LOU lay lifeless on the divan in the parlor. Stanley, who never before had had to deal with a woman in a faint, took one of her cold hands and rubbed it in both of his.

After a minute she stirred, opened her eyes, and with a sigh lifted her arms to him. Their lips met. They had been through hell together, they loved, and no formal proposal was necessary.

"I've got to see about those men," he muttered reluctantly, after a blissful moment.

"What happened? I heard shooting, and then I saw—" she shuddered. "Was he going to let that 'gator e-e-eat me?"

"I don't think so. He wanted to scare me into agreeing to get him the

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money. He said it was just a demonstration. Anyway, his demonstration scared his henchmen as much as it did us. They couldn't take their eyes off the alligator, and that gave me a break."

"Where is Lemaire now?"

"Dead, I think."

"And—and the others?"

"Dead or wounded.—I went berserk."

"You are the bravest man—!"

"I've got to see about those men. We're not out of the woods yet."

"I'll go with you."

She rose, but he pushed her gently back on the divan.

"No, no! There may be trouble."

He stepped out on the porch. The "deputy sheriffs" were unconscious, but they were alive, and laying upon the body of his master, sobbing like a child, was the Negro butler. He didn't hear Stanton until the muzzle of an empty revolver was thrust against the back of his head.

"Get up," Stanton commanded. "See what you can do for those wounded men, and then telephone to the police. Don't lose any time, either."

"Yas, suh! Don't shoot poor old Pompey, suh! I do anything you say, suh," exclaimed the terrified black man.

With Mary Lou's head on his breast, a minute or so later, Stanton sat beside her on the divan and waited for the police. He had no fear of difficulty with the authorities over the shooting of those three scoundrels. His story and hers would be ample justification. But it would mean that they must tell the whole truth, and that neither the Regniers nor Stanley Stanton would be able to secure the Gautier fortune. It would go to the State.

Neither cared, however. Stanton was completely happy, and Mary Lou's content was only modified by the predicament of her beloved grandfather.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SPOILS.

A POLICE car came to an abrupt stop before the door of the mansion, in less than ten minutes. Officers rushed into the house and stood in amazement at the sweet domestic picture in the drawing room, in such weird contrast to the tragic appearance of the front of the house.

"What's happened here?" demanded the sergeant in charge. "Who in hell are you two?"

Stanley, aided by Mary Lou, explained exactly what had happened. Conviction in the police mind was helped by a long-standing police suspicion over the business of Professor Lemaire.

"This place always did give me the horrors," declared the sergeant. "So he tied this girl to a stake and called up his 'gators, did he? Well, we're going to have an alligator hunt out here to-morrow."

Stanley took advantage of the sergeant's attitude to say that he believed that Lemaire had been responsible for the murder of Alphonse Gautier.

The policeman heard this dubiously.

"These Creoles still fight duels," he replied. "And old man Regnier admits there was a duel.—Well, Lemaire is dead, but his two boys have a little life in 'em. We'll see what we can get out of them."

A statement from François Duval, one of the wounded "deputy sheriffs," the confession of the black Pompey Washington, and a clipping from the New York *Times* in which a reporter commented upon the discovery of a

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customs officer that Gautier upon arriving from Europe was carrying a bag containing a fortune in French francs, cleared things up.

The murder had been perpetrated exactly as Stanley Stanton had figured it out, and the chief feature which had mystified him, the presence of the "deputies" in the old house the following morning was not at all mysterious.

Lemaire, with his two men, had concealed themselves in a bedroom during the duel, where Lemaire had removed his crimson-lined opera coat. Having run a sword through Gautier, in a rage at his obstinacy, he had fled when the police pounded on the street door. Lemaire had rushed out of the house, sword in hand, and thrust the weapon under a hedge in the rear garden, where it subsequently was found by the police. That explained why only one sword was found at the scene of the crime. However, he had left his cloak lying on a chair in the bed chamber.

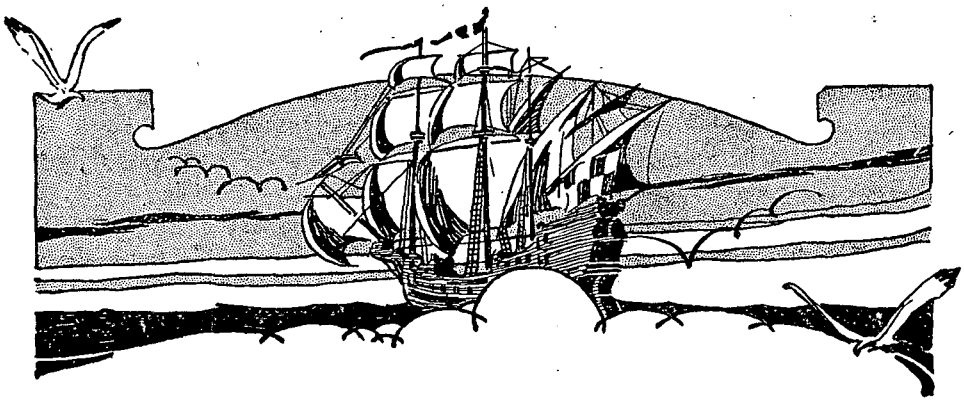
As soon as the police had departed and the body had been removed, Lemaire's henchmen had gone back in hope that the cloak had been overlooked. And to their delight, Miss Regnier had walked right into their clutches, with Gautier's fortune gripped in her hand.

Of course Stanton was compelled to turn the hoard that reposed in the safety deposit box over to the police; but the Gautier estate was immediately attached by Regnier's attorney.

There was ample evidence of the thirty-year-old embezzlement of the Regnier funds, the amount of which, with accrued interest, exceeded the cash in the hands of the authorities. There was no Gautier heir to combat the suit, and although the case, even at this late date, is still in the courts, the general opinion is that the entire sum will be turned over to the Regniers.

Mary Lou and Stanley Stanton did not wait for the result of the lawsuit to bring to its proper conclusion a love affair so strangely begun. Stanton came out of the business with so much credit that he received an offer from a New Orleans firm, an offer that was so liberal that he resigned his New York advertising position. And Mr. and Mrs. Stanton are now living in an old house in the Vieux Carré; a house which has a beautiful old-fashioned French garden. Old Maurice Regnier heartily approves of this first alliance between one of his family and a member of the Anglo-Saxon race.

THE END.



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"You're killin' me!" the gangster screamed. "Turn it off!"

Tunnel Men

By BORDEN CHASE

Beneath New York's East River it wasn't the "sand hogs" who needed protection in that gangland struggle

Novelette—Complete

CHAPTER I.

THE TREAT.

HIGH above the flat roofs of the surrounding warehouses, the tall mast of a derrick pointed at the summer sky. From the narrow street that flanked the river, it appeared as a beckoning finger, calling an insistent summons to Mat Shire. He shifted a heavy traveling bag to his left hand. An eager light came into his eyes as he waved an arm in the direction of the derrick.

"Hello, old stiff-leg," he said. "Looks good to see you sticking up over the job."

He lifted a huge paw to the back of his head and tipped the light gray fedora slightly over one eye. His massive shoulders swayed as he lurched forward, planting each foot solidly and carefully on the ground.

"You'd have looked better a week

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ago," he continued, rambling on in the manner of men who work beneath the rivers. "Sixteen days to get from Antwerp to Brooklyn—huh—a fine tub I picked to cross the ocean. Could have made better time in a rowboat."

He rounded the corner and paused before a high board fence that blocked one section of the street. A gaunt structure supported by heavy wooden beams and topped by a solidly planked platform stretched across the width of the roadway. Through its center, swift moving elevators brought small iron muck-cars loaded with sand from the tunnel below the river. Above, the ponderous boom of the stiff-leg—a giant derrick—hovered over a row of waiting trucks from which iron plates, bags of cement and gravel were being rapidly hoisted.

As he watched, a gang of roughly clad men crowded onto one of the waiting cages. Sharp and clear above the clatter of the hoist engines came the command: "Cut the rope!" The cage started downward. Mat Shire stretched to the limit of his six feet of muscular bulk. He cupped a hand to his mouth and sent forth a deep-throated bellow. The gang caught sight of the man in the street as the cage flashed past the fence top. Loud cries of greeting echoed up out of the shaft, fading quickly as the car dropped. The huge sand hog grinned happily and hurried toward the company office.

At the end of the fence, close by the tunnel shaft, a two story red brick house had been converted into a field office. On a large wooden sign, flaring letters proclaimed that here were the general superintendent's quarters of the firm of Barton & Ranger.

Mat Shire lurched heavily up the steps. He swung open the door, paused for a backward glance at the tunnel shaft and entered the office. In the far corner of the room, Frank Barton glanced up from a disorderly pile of blue-prints that were scattered about his desk.

"Mat—Mat Shire—I'm glad to see you!" He sprang to his feet and hurried forward with outstretched hand. "I thought you were in Belgium."

"Finished up last month," grunted Mat. He seized Barton's hand in a powerful grip. "I'd have been here last week if I hadn't picked a mud scow to bring me back."

"Then you didn't get my message?"

"What message?"

"I sent you a cable offering you the day shift on this job. The firm you were with sent me a reply. They said you had disappeared—didn't know where you were."

Mat laughed as he helped himself to a cigar from an open box on Barton's desk.

"Yeah, I disappeared. I finished the damn tunnel for them, then they arranged a big celebration. The king was going to be there—medals—speeches—you know, all that sort of stuff. Nuts—the job was over so I ducked."

FRANK BARTON smiled. He motioned the towering sand hog to a chair near the desk. Mat Shire's ways were well known to him. He was always moving on—drifting from one part of the world to another, laughing, gambling, facing death beneath the river with a jest, living for to-day and with little thought of to-morrow. His wages as a compressed air worker were large, but pay day invariably found him broke.

Barton knew the reason for Mat's return upon a freighter. With no money to book passage, the huge tun-

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nel man had put those wide shoulders to work, swinging a scoop in the fire-room. He recalled the way Shire had arrived at the shaft of the Holland Tunnel—crawling out from beneath a freight car as it rolled into the Jersey yards. A week previous he had received two hundred dollars in his pay envelope as shift superintendent on the Detroit River Tunnel. It had probably lasted two days—perhaps one. Mat had been known to gamble that much on the turn of a card. But he was always a welcome sight to Frank Barton, and never more so than at present.

The general superintendent lifted a bottle and glasses from a desk drawer and poured two stiff drinks. One glass disappeared as the fingers of Mat's rocklike fist cloved round it.

"Happy days." He tilted the liquor into his cavernous mouth.

Barton put his lips to the rim of his glass, but barely tasted the whisky.

"Not so happy, Mat," he said.

"Why—what's wrong?"

"Plenty! We're going to have trouble on this tunnel—lots of it, and it's due soon."

"Aw, now, Frank," growled Mat. "You're not going to cut the wages, are you? Don't tell me I came all the way to Brooklyn on a canal boat and got here just in time for a strike."

"No—it's nothing like that. You know I've always paid union scale wages. This is something a good deal more serious."

"More serious than money?" asked Shire in pretended surprise.

"Well, Mat, here it is," said Barton. "Short and to the point. The Regan mob have been trying to sell me protection. They say if I don't pay they'll wreck the job."

"The Regan mob?" said Shire. "Who are they?"

"They're a pretty tough bunch of gangsters that have been running things to suit themselves in this section of town. One of their representatives called here a few hours ago and demanded ten thousand dollars. He claimed for this amount their 'organization' would keep things peaceful and there would be no trouble."

"Did you wring his neck?" grunted Mat.

"No—I didn't. I asked him for a few hours to think it over."

"You must be getting soft," said Mat. "You've got three hundred sand hogs on this job. Any ten men in the outfit would wrap up that mob and think it was fun."

Frank Barton rose wearily to his feet. He crossed the office and glanced through a window that let out onto the shaft. The slanting rays of the afternoon sun threw into bold relief the lines of worry etched deeply about his eyes.

"Yes, Mat, I know they would," he said slowly. "But the Regan crowd are a slimy bunch of rats—you can't put your finger on them. In fact, you never know where they are until a gun goes off and some one has been shot in the back."

Mat Shire poured himself another drink. He tossed it off with a single motion and looked thoughtfully into the bottom of the glass.

"Gangsters, eh?" His deep voice rumbled up out of his throat. "I'd like to get my hands on one of them."

THERE was a sound of light footsteps on the stairs, and a girl stood framed in the doorway. She started across the office—took three steps and then caught sight of the giant sand hog.

"Mat—oh, Mat!" she cried. Her

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eyes seemed to catch fire as she repeated the name. "You're home!"

"Hello, brat," grinned Shire. He turned to face the smiling girl.

"Oh, Mat, you big bear, when did you arrive? And—and I'm not a brat. I'm Miss Barton to you."

His bellow of laughter seemed to shake the office walls. He lurched to his feet. The girl was tall, unusually tall, but Mat's swooping arms caught her as though she were a child and lifted her high in the air.

"Barrie Barton," he roared. "My little Barrie—all grown up into a fine lady. Why, Frank"—he turned to the smiling superintendent—"she's beautiful. Look at that hair; it's the color of sand—golden sand, Barrie—the kind you find under the rivers. And your ears, they're like—like—"

"Like mud, I suppose!" Her hands beat furiously against his huge chest. "Mat Shire—put me down this instant. I'm *not* a baby—you mustn't treat me like this. I—I hate you."

Her lips trembled. Two large tears gathered in the corners of her eyes. They grew, clinging momentarily to the long lashes, then rolled slowly down her cheeks. Suddenly her head went down upon his shoulder—her arms around his neck.

"Oh, Mat—no—I don't hate you. But can't you see I'm—that I've—"

He lowered her gently until her feet rested upon the floor. His face became grave as he held her at arm's length, studying her intently.

"I'm sorry, Barrie," he said at length. "I didn't realize that little girls grew up. That was mean of me. Overlook it if you can—I'm just a fool. And from now on you're Miss Barton—but you were such a cute little shaver when you were small, a lovable little brat—wasn't she, Frank?"

"Yes, Mat," said Barton, "she was. And you were always her hero. I used to hear so much about 'Uncle Nat' that I was a bit jealous at times. She hasn't spoken quite so much about you during the past few years, and I thought maybe she had forgotten you. But one night I found her reading a newspaper clipping about that Belgian job. There was a picture of you, and if I'm not mistaken Barrie was crying a little."

"Father! Stop it—you're mean. Oh, both of you are horrid. I'm sorry I came to your nasty old tunnel job."

A dull flush rose to her cheeks and she seated herself beside the desk. She opened her purse and searched hurriedly through it for her compact.

Her father laughed and left the window. He crossed to his chair and motioned for Mat to sit down.

Three sharp raps sounded on the panel of the door. A frown clouded Barton's face. He glanced quickly at his watch.

"I'm afraid you'll have to run along, Barrie," he said nervously. "I'm expecting some one—a business matter."

"Oh, father, I've hardly had a word with Mat. We'll just sit here and talk in whispers—surely that won't interfere."

"I'm sorry, dear, but this—"

Again came the insistent knock.

"Must be one of the Regan boys," growled Mat. "Sand hogs never knock. I'll step out and see him."

"No—don't do that," said Barton. He sat quietly for a moment as though framing a course of action.

"Regan?" asked Barrie. "What are the Regan crowd doing here?"

"You know of them?" asked her father in surprise.

"Why, of course I do. Every one

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has heard of those murderers. I've always wanted to see what a gangster looked like. Let him come in, father—please."

The knock sounded a third time.

"Come in," called Barton.

THE door opened to admit a slim, neatly dressed man. He was short, slightly stooped, and he crossed the room with a peculiar sliding gait—quick, jerky steps that placed him abruptly before the desk of the superintendent.

He glanced at Barrie and grinned, then turned slightly and looked directly into the scowling face of Mat Shire. His right hand held the stub of a broken match with which he picked at his teeth. His left hung loosely at his side and the fingers twitched nervously as he faced the superintendent.

"Well, how about it?" he snapped.

"I don't know," answered Barton. "I haven't made up my mind."

"Quit stallin'!" The words were sharp. Everything about the man was jerky, erratic. He reminded Mat Shire of the rats that had swarmed about the tunnel shafts in Belgium—sleek, swift moving, furtive creatures that hunted in packs and would attack a man if their numbers were great enough.

"I tell you I've got to have more time."

Barton's words roused Mat from his reverie. He rose slowly to his feet. Two lurching strides brought him to the side of the gangster.

The man wheeled quickly. His hand left the match stub and streaked beneath his armpit. Mat's ponderous paw moved with a speed that was inconsistent with its bulk. He caught the gangster's wrist in a vise-like grip. He twisted. A shrill yelp of pain was wrenched from the gunman's lips. A dull black automatic clattered to the floor.

Mat grunted. His left hand reached out and caught the gangster's belt, his right released its grip upon the wrist and slid upward to the throat. He heaved—and the struggling man was lifted high above the head of the towering sand hog. Again Mat grunted. He shook the gunman—shook him as he had seen a terrier shake one of those rats in Belgium.

Barrie Barton sat quietly beside the desk. An amused grin crinkled the corners of her mouth. Her eyes shone brightly.

"So that's a gangster," she laughed. "What are you going to do with it, Mat?"

"Open the door," growled Shire.

Barrie seized the knob and swung it open with a flourish. She stepped back and ducked. The hurtling body of the gangster landed with a crash upon the steps and rolled down into the gutter. Barrie closed the door. She seated herself and once again fumbled for her compact.

"Rats," grumbled Mat. He reached for the bottle.

Frank Barton had been silent while Mat disposed of the gangster. Now he rested his elbows upon the desk and cupped his chin upon one hand.

"I'm afraid you've made a mistake, Mat," he said. "I've wanted to do that—all afternoon I've been fighting down the desire to wring that fellow's neck when he arrived. But I realize how dangerous that crew can be."

"Dangerous?" roared Mat. "Say, Frank, have you forgotten the time when we were driving a water tunnel in Mexico and that Villa mob tried to—"

His words were lost in the noise of

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a thunderous crash. As one, the three rushed to the door.

"The derrick boom!" cried Barton.

CHAPTER II.

REPRISAL.

HE pointed frantically to the spot over the tunnel shaft where the huge arm of the hoist had stood. Now it lay a twisted mass of wreckage and tangled wires.

"It fell on top of the power lines." Barton's voice was hoarse with fear. "Those lines carry the electricity to the power house."

The vivid blue flames that flashed from the severed and tangled wires seemed to burn into the very brains of the group in the office. The feed lines to the power house! The motive power that kept those huge compressors turning over and over to supply the life-giving air to the men in the tunnel. Now they were cut and the machinery must stop.

Barton groaned. He thought of the heading below the river where men were burrowing along, breathing this compressed air, depending upon it to keep out the river. Air—it was life itself!

Without the air every man in the tunnel was condemned to death. Death—and burial, too, for the slimy bed of the river would surge in and flood the heading as soon as the restraining pressure of the compressed air was cut off.

Mat Shire leaped down the steps.

"Barton," he roared, "get over to the electrician's shanty. Get those guys on the job. Tell 'em to rush a new set of feeders over to that break. Come on, old timer—let's go! Round up some of the hogs—send 'em to the storehouse for rubber gloves. We'll untangle that mess. Barrie"—he turned to the girl—"call the electric company and tell 'em what's happened. Tell 'em to get a crew down here in five minutes or I'll break a few heads. And stay in the office—keep away from the shaft."

Before he had finished speaking, Mat was off to the gage-tender's shanty located at the side of the shaft. From this small, corrugated iron shack the huge pipe lines, carrying the all-important compressed air, led down the shaft and into the tunnel. A man was constantly on watch, studying the gages, manipulating the valves, and keeping a steady flow of air surging into the tubes beneath the river.

On one wall of the house was a telephone, and as Mat crashed in through the door the gage-tender was yelling into the mouthpiece.

"Gimme some air, power house—for the lova God, gimme some air! I don't givva damn what's gone wrong. All I know is I need more air. The gages are fallin' and if I don't get forty pounds on the line damn quick there ain't gonna be no more tunnel!"

Mat grabbed the receiver from the man's hand and jiggled the hook.

"Operator! Operator! Get the north tunnel on here. Make it fast, damn it! Hello—hello—north tunnel? Close up that heading! Mud up the face! Plug up every leak you can stop—hold all the air. It's all you're going to get for twenty minutes, maybe longer. I know—yeah, I know you need more air, but you ain't goin' to get it—so hang on to every damn pound you got."

Once more a frantic jiggling of the hook.

"Operator—cut that north tunnel off and give me the south—quick!"

Two tubes were being driven beneath the river to meet and join two from

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the opposite side. The south tunnel was the leader, being driven one hundred feet ahead of the north. It was here that danger was the greatest. Creeping ahead foot by foot, ever getting deeper beneath the bed of the river —this bore kept the lead.

AS Mat waited for a reply from the other end of the wire, across his mind flashed a picture of what must be happening below. Clearly, as though he were standing in the heading, the spearhead of the tunnel, he could vision the dreaded scene that was taking place.

The sudden hushed silence—the awful dread that gripped the men as they realized the air was no longer pouring in. The slithering hiss of the water as it seeped in to take the place of the escaping air.

"Hello—south tunnel? Mud up! Stop all your leaks! I know—I know the river's comin' in—fight it—don't lose that heading. Yeah, this is Mat Shire—be seein' you later."

Leaving the gage-tender's shanty, Mat rushed to the twisted mass of wreckage where the sand hogs were pulling and tearing at wires through which hummed thousands of volts of electricity.

Thick black clouds of smoke were rising as the insulation smoldered. Men were stepping warily about as, with hands protected by heavy rubber gloves, they tried to get the feed wires sorted from the snarl.

In a few minutes the power company would shut off the current—but minutes were precious. There was no time to stand idly by and wait. The electricians were preparing to splice in auxiliary cables to the power house. They worked with frantic haste to start the huge compressors turning and send the air hurtling down through the pipes to the tunnel.

A brawny miner made the fatal mistake of stepping upon a bare wire. His scream was choked off as it left his lips and his body jerked spasmodically as it lashed back and forth under the surge of the current.

Mat Shire snatched a pair of gloves from the hands of a near-by sand hog. He seized one of the miner's arms. Barton jumped to help him and caught the other arm. They tugged and pulled for a moment, but to no avail.

"He's through, Mat," cried Barton. "Drop him and get back to work!"

A faint cry sounded behind them. Mat turned quickly. Barrie was standing beside the door of the hoist room, a small building that housed the machinery for operating the derrick. Her eyes were wide with horror, her hands clutched at her throat. Beside her, the still form of a man lay huddled against the wall of the building. But Barrie's eyes were not upon him; they were fixed with a rigid intensity upon the dead miner.

"Oh, Mat," she cried. "They've killed him. They've killed Jerry Conners—"

"Barrie!" roared Mat. "What are you doing here? I told you to stay in the office. Get back, child—for God's sake get back!"

Suddenly the crackling and flashing ceased. The power was off. The electricians hastily spliced into the cables and the work was finished as the emergency crew from the power company arrived to take charge.

"Get some juice on that line," ordered Mat. "If you take more than two minutes to do it, I'll turn these sand hogs loose on you. They'll rip you and your crew to pieces."

The foreman of the emergency crew

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made a hurried inspection of the splices and dashed for a telephone to order the current back on the line. The compressors in the power house again took up their rhythmical hum and the gages in the shanty rose pound by pound.

FRANK BARTON directed the company doctor to take charge of the dead miner and then stepped into the gage shanty to notify the men beneath the river that the danger was over.

As Mat watched him, he realized that Barton had grown old. He saw for the first time the deep lines of worry about his eyes, the gray with which his hair was streaked. Mat wondered if the financial success that had come to his friend had been worth the cost. True, Barton was the senior partner of one of the largest contracting firms in the country. But he had worked his way up from the ranks, and even now insisted upon acting as his own general superintendent.

Mat smiled as his mind flashed back to other tunnels on which they had worked in the past. He recalled that Barton had always been quiet, calm, and practical, while he—a roaring, fighting sand hog—had crashed along, flinging his money to the winds as he went. Now Frank Barton was wealthy and Mat Shire had less than five dollars in his pocket. But the towering sand hog knew he was the happier man. He grinned and slowly shook his head.

"How can you stand there smiling?" asked Barrie. Her hands were clenched and she held them tightly against her sides. Her lower lip trembled; she caught it fiercely between her teeth.

The jacket of her tailored suit was torn, her shoes muddy, one heel broken. She stood before the entrance of the hoist room, one shoulder braced against the door. Mat hurried toward her.

"Now look here, child," he said, somewhat roughly. "I thought I told you to get back to the office. Why didn't you go?"

"But you are smiling." She ignored his question. "How can you, Mat, with Jerry Conners—?"

"The tunnels are a hard game, Barrie. You should know that. Death doesn't seem—I don't know just how to put it, but—well, it isn't such a terrible thing when you see it constantly. Jerry was a fine chap, but it happened to be his turn to go. It was an accident and you have to expect accidents on a tunnel job."

"Accident!" The word snapped with the bite of a lash. "Accident! Do you think that was an accident?"

"Of course—probably a bad cable."

"You're wrong, Mat. There's nothing the matter with the cables. That derrick boom was dropped purposely. While you were getting those feeders straightened out, I went to the hoist room to find why the boom had fallen. A man was backing from the doorway. He wasn't a sand hog—I knew that by his clothes. Through the open door I could see Joe Powers, the hoist engineer, and he was sprawled out on the floor. The man had—"

"Why didn't you tell me sooner?" roared Mat. "Where is he? Where did he go to?"

"He's in the hoist room. I turned him over to Powers. Joe is all right now—he has a nasty lump on his head, that's all."

"You turned him over to Joe?" said Mat in amazement. "You—Barrie—what did you do?"

"I hit him with a pick handle. I had to, Mat—I had to stop him."

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"A pick handle!" he cried. "You—you did that?"

HE leaped forward, seized the girl by the shoulders and from his eyes there blazed a light of admiration, almost of worship. He held her firmly, swayed by a surge of conflicting emotions. This girl, his little Barrie, had become a woman.

A strong woman who would fight with her hands, a true daughter of a tunnel man. His blunt fingers bit deeply into her arms. He shook her with a rough tenderness. It was the nearest thing to a caress of which Mat Shire was capable. Barrie knew that he would never look upon her as a child again. She knew that he loved her.

He brushed her aside, lurched past her and sprang into the hoist room.

"Joe," he cried. "Where is that rat?"

Behind the drum of the hoist on which the cable wound in snakelike coils, the shaggy head of Joe Powers rose slowly into sight. There was a smear of blood that started at one eye and streaked downward to his outthrust jaw. A corncob pipe with a broken stem jutted from between his tightly clenched teeth. He smiled—but it was a grim smile.

"He's here, Mat," he growled. "But ye'll not be takin' him away fer a bit. I'm not quite finished with the murtherin' blaggard."

Shire stepped around the drum and his eyes narrowed as they fell upon the object of Powers's attentions.

"You haven't done half bad," he growled. "I'd like to let you finish him. He deserves it, Joe—he's killed Jerry Conners and nearly flooded the tunnel. But I've got to find the rest of his mob and he's going to tell me where to get them."

He reached down and gripped the gangster by the throat. With a single jerk of his ponderous arm, he lifted the man to an upright position. Beside the hoist wa a large packing box that had been converted by Powers into an improvised chair.

Mat slammed the limp figure into the seat and reached for the water bottle Joe usually kept in the room. A liberal dousing brought a flicker of consciousness to the badly beaten gangster.

"Barrie, come in here," called Mat.

The girl entered and stood by his side. Her lip curled as she glanced at the gunman.

"That's the man," she said. "Joe has changed his features a little but those eyes—ugh, they look like a snake's."

"I had to be sure," said Mat. "I want you to find your father and ask him to step in here. And Barrie"—he paused —"this time, don't come back—stay in the office."

THE girl trembled slightly but held her head firmly erect as she left the room. As the door closed, the muscles of Mat's jaws bunched in solid knots. A look of grim determination settled upon his face and he stepped slowly toward the gangster.

"What's your name?" he growled.

There was no reply. A huge paw crashed into the gangster's face.

"What's your name?"

"John Smith." The answer came through puffed and bleeding lips. "That's the only name you'll get from me, wise guy."

"All right, Smith," said Mat. "You're going to answer some questions. Where does your boss hole out?"

"You can't make me talk," snarled the gunman. "I've been kicked around by every cop in Brooklyn. They give

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me the third degree so many times I'm gettin' used to it. If you mugs think you can get anything out of me, just try it."

"Oh, so that's it," growled Mat. "Smart, eh? Well, you'll talk."

Frank Barton stepped into the hoist room. He glanced at the sullen gangster and turned to Shire.

"Barrie told me about it," he said. "I was afraid of this. You see what we are up against. These murderers will stop at nothing."

"We'll stop them," answered the giant sand hog. "As soon as this rat tells me where Regan is we'll show him what it means to kill a tunnel man."

"Will ye let me work on the murtherer?" asked Powers.

The hoist engineer had been an interested spectator to Shire's questioning. Now he stepped forward, flexing the fingers of his muscular hands. "'Twill do me heart good to get one more whack at 'im."

"No, Joe, not now. Take him up onto the gantry and keep him there. There are two gangs coming out of the tunnel. Tell them to stay by the cages—I want to talk to them. Send a man after the other gangs and have them all there in five minutes."

Powers nodded in understanding and dragged the snarling gangster from the room. When they had gone, Mat laid a friendly hand on Barton's shoulder.

"You don't mind me taking hold of things?" he asked.

"Thank God you are here to do it," answered Barton. "I—I've just realized I'm a good bit older than I imagined. I'm tired—tired and worried."

"I know it, Frank. But we'll clean things up in short order. I'm going to talk to the men and I want you there to back me up. In addition to that, I want you to hear their decision."

They left the hoist room and climbed the long flight of wooden stairs that led to the structure above. There were more than a hundred sand hogs grouped about the gates of the elevators. They were a roughly clad, savage-faced body of men. The wet sand of the river bed was coated upon their khaki shirts and their boots clumped heavily as they shuffled about, talking in undertones.

JOE POWERS stood beside a pile of massive curved iron plates, the segments that formed the tunnel lining. A scowling group of miners who, but an hour ago, had been battling the river when the air failed, were ringed about the hoist engineer and his cowering captive. With them were other men of the gangs—muckers, iron-men, heading bosses and lock-tenders.

The bitter story of the gangsters' treachery had roused a sullen fury in the sand hogs and they waited impatiently to learn what reprisals were to be made.

When Mat Shire and the superintendent joined them on the gantry, a hundred pairs of eyes were turned to the towering sand hog. The angry murmuring grew to a roar as the men recognized their leader and the timbers shook with the thunder of their shouts. Mat raised his arms above his head in a gesture demanding silence. There was a sudden quiet.

"You know what's happened, men," said Mat. "That rat over there released the brake on the hoist. He's a murderer, but he isn't the one we want. He takes his orders from a man named Regan, and Regan has demanded ten thousand dollars from Frank Barton.

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That is the price that has been set upon your lives. Barton is willing to pay that amount—gladly, if it will insure your safety."

Shouts of disapproval greeted his words. The men were loud in their chorus of refusal. Shire smi' ' ar lifted his hand.

"I know, I know how you fe out that. Sand hogs have never had .o pay protection money to a gang of sneaking rats that haven't the courage to come out into the open. And, what's more, we never will! If you men are with me, we'll clean out this nest of vermin—we'll give them a taste of what it's like beneath the river. I'm going to take this sneak down into the lock and ask him a few questions. When I come up we'll pay a call on Regan."

The roaring shout that answered Shire's speech rolled in a mighty wave along the narrow streets of the waterfront.

The sand hogs leaped madly about, pounding each other's backs and shaking picks, shovels, and heavy wrenches above their heads. The lips of the captive gangster drew back in a sneering grin and he swaggered as Mat led him onto the cage.

Shire was about to give the signal to lower the elevator when a short, heavy-chested mucker stepped forward from the crowd. His jaw was set in a hard line of grim resolve. There was death in his eyes.

"Jerry Conners is—was—my brother," he said. "I'm coming with you."

Mat Shire slowly nodded his head. He lifted his hand as a signal and the cage fell swiftly down the shaft. The gangster glanced nervously about as the damp walls rushed past and there was no smile upon his face when the cage stopped with a slight jar at the bottom.

CHAPTER III.

A NEW THIRD DEGREE.

BEFORE him, the curving shell of the tunnel extended a distance of twenty feet. A solid bulkhead of concrete spanned the tube at this point. The circular iron diaphragms of the air locks jutted slightly from the gray wall. The small bull's-eyes in the lock doors seemed to peer at him like the glassy eyes of some weird reptilian monster. A bellowing blast of compressed air roared into the shaft as a lock-tender swung open a valve. To the trembling gangster it appeared that the monster lived and had howled in rage.

Mat Shire gave him little time for thought. The man-lock door was swung open and Mike Conners, the brother of the murdered man, forced the gunman into the iron cylinder. Behind them came the giant sand hog, crouching as he stepped into the lock.

The gangster's eyes darted nervously about. He was in a new world. The dark streets of the Brooklyn river front seemed miles away.

The men of his mob were but a scant half miles from the shaft—he knew every alley and dimly lit passageway that led to the docks—Furman Street was directly above him, but—*above him* was the trouble. The street was above him, everything was above him—he was beneath the earth. He shuddered. It made him think of a grave.

When the heavy iron door swung closed it clanged with a weird finality. It sounded like the closing of a tomb. The circular gray walls of the lock seemed to close in upon him. He lifted

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his head with a startled jerk. It thudded against the arched iron roof. He yelped.

There were two low wooden benches against the sides of the cylinder. He seated himself. Before him stood the giant sand hog. At one end of the lock sat Mike Conners, silently watching him. The gunman quickly turned his head. He stared into the unfriendly eyes of the stooping lock-tender. The man held his hand upon a valve.

"You guys can't scare me," sneered the gangster. He clenched his teeth—tried to tell himself that this was all an act—that he wasn't afraid. But he knew he was.

"We're not trying to scare you," growled Mat. "We're just going to make you talk. We're going to turn the air into this lock in a minute. You don't know how to equalize the pressure in the upper passages of your head. We're not going to tell. Then you are going to learn what compressed air can do to a man—one of the things it can do."

HE nodded his head to the lock-tender. The valve was opened. A screaming blast of compressed air tore in through the pipe line that led from the pressure side of the tunnel. Each sand hog opened his mouth slightly. They gaped, forcing their ear-drums to flex and balance the pressure in their heads. Mat Shire's eyes were fixed on the air gage. The pointer was rising swiftly. One pound, two, three—it trembled at five and a horrible scream welled from the contorted lips of the gangster. His hands beat frantically against the sides of his head. He thrust his fingers into his ears. It seemed as though two glowing steel knife points were being forced against his ear-drums.

The pain was sharp, insistent, steady—it increased as the pointer crept slowly around the gage.

"Stop it!" he cried. "Stop—I can't stand it!"

Mat lifted his hand. The gage-tender closed the valve. A silence enveloped the lock.

"Want to talk?" asked Shire.

The gangster rocked slowly back and forth, both hands pressed tightly to his ears. He glared at Mat through slitted eyes. His teeth were clenched.

"Suit yourself," grunted Mat. "You've only seven pounds on now—there's forty on the line."

He motioned to the lock-tender. Again the air shrilled. The gunman left the bench in a scrambling leap. The lock was filled with his tortured cries. He rushed at the lock-tender. Mat reached a huge paw and caught him by the collar. The frenzied gunman twisted and fought—scratching, biting, baring his teeth. Again Mat was reminded of those rats in Belgium. He had seen one of them act in just such fashion when cornered. He caught the gangster by the scruff of the neck and threw him to the floor. Air poured in.

To the murderer on the floor it seemed as though molten metal had been poured into his ears. The pain was maddening. He scrambled to his feet, rushed the length of the cylinder and crouched before Mike Conners.

"Make him stop!" he screamed. "My ears—they're bustin'. Oh, my God—my ears."

Conners looked slowly into the contorted face. The fingers of his broad hands clenched into fists. They relaxed—gripped the sniveling gunman by the coat—jerked him erect.

"Do you know who you're kneeling to?" he said. "Are you ready to meet that God you are crying about?"

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The gangster tore himself free. He dashed wildly toward the far end of the lock. Foam dripped from his lips. It was flecked with blood. The pain in his ears was fiendish. He dropped to his knees and beat madly upon the floor.

"I'll talk," he screamed. "I'll talk—turn it off."

The roar of air stopped.

"Where are they?" asked Mat.

"Under the bridge," whined the gangster. "Go down Furman Street till you get to the Brooklyn Bridge. Then go along the water front a few blocks and you'll come to a one-story building. That's the clubhouse. Both the Regans will be there."

"Both of them?" asked Mat. "So there's two of them, eh?"

"Yeah, Marty and Ed. Now let me out of here—I told you all I know."

MAT SHIRE motioned to the exhaust valve. The lock-tender swung it open. The pressure lessened and the straining features of the gangster relaxed. The pain was still intense, would be for hours, but the horrible thrust of the compressed air was gone.

Mike Conners swung open the door. He gripped the gangster firmly by the arm.

"You're finished with him now, Mat," he said. "Let me have him."

"I know what you'd like to do," said Mat. "I don't blame you. But think it over, Mike. The State of New York uses electricity to kill rats. We'll get a written confession from this one that will send him to the chair. He cracked under twelve pounds of air; we'll give him forty next time if we have to. Think it over, old-timer—remember how your brother died and let this fellow go the same way."

They stepped into a waiting cage. It rose swiftly. At the gantry level they were met by the growing crowd of sand hogs. Mat instructed two of the men to take the gangster to the company office. He called to Frank Barton and they stepped a short distance away from the men.

"I'm going to do something that is not quite within the law," said Mat. "If we were in Mexico I'd want you with me. But this is different. There may be trouble with the authorities. I don't want you mixed up in it, Frank. Stay here at the job, see to it that Barrie gets home safely, and let me take care of the rest."

Barton was about to protest, but Mat silenced him with a friendly wave of his hand. He turned to the sand hogs and studied them silently for a moment.

"I want thirty men," he said.

The entire crowd surged forward.

"I said thirty," said Mat. "Not a hundred and thirty. If I took all of you along every cop in Brooklyn would know what was going to happen. Mike Conners and Joe Powers will each pick fifteen men. Meet me down in the street in five minutes. The rest of you stay here. Remember, we're driving tunnel."

CHAPTER IV.

SAND HOGS' BATTLE.

MAT walked down the gantry steps and stood before the company office. Wild shouts drifted down to him and Mat smiled as he realized that both Conners and Powers would need the judgment of a Solomon to choose their men.

The office door opened and Barrie hurried to his side. Her eyes were wide

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and an anxious frown disturbed her features. Mat suddenly realized that never had he seen a girl so beautiful. Her golden hair glowed beneath the rays of a near-by street light. Her shoulders were wide, almost mannish, but the graceful lines of her tall figure provided a charm that was truly feminine.

Mat wondered how this lovely girl could care for him. True, women had always been attracted to him, but that was very different.

He was lavish with his money, handsome in a rugged way, and a splendid specimen of muscular manhood. In every port of the world girls had drifted into his life, laughed with him, spent his money and had been dismissed with a grin. Yes, this was very different.

Mat didn't like to think of those other girls now—not when he looked at Barrie. It made him wish that he were younger—that his life had been different.

"Why are you here?" he asked.

"I must stay," she answered. She slipped her hand into his. "I know what you are going to do. A few hours ago I thought it was a lark. It sounded like the stories father had told me. Stories of you—fighting, laughing, beating down everything in your path. Now I am afraid. Those men have guns—you may be hurt—killed—"

Her nails bit deeply into his calloused hand. Her head was back. She stared deeply into his eyes, drawing him to her by the sheer force of her appeal. A warm fragrance seemed to glow from her person, holding him, binding him to her.

There was a thunder of booted feet upon the gantry stairs. Mat crushed the girl to his side. He kissed her, roughly.

"I'll make an awful husband," he said. There was a smile in his eyes, but none about his lips. "Sand hogs always do."

He turned to the men coming down the steps. He lifted his arm and waved. They shouted and followed him along the dimly lit street beside the river bank. Their torn, mud stained working clothes faded into the shadows of the warehouses. Their faces, pale and gaunt from the ravages of the compressed air, appeared to be floating through the darkness—moving spots of white.

Upon their shoulders they carried long handled wrenches, and shovels. Some of them held pick handles which they swung through the air, testing the heft and balance of the hickory. They walked silently, a grim detachment from the army of labor, carrying the attack to their enemies.

Beneath the darker shadows of the bridge, they turned toward the river. To the left, the climbing towers of lower New York were sharply printed against the dull red of the sunset's afterglow.

It was evening across the flickering waters of the river. Beside the massive pillars of the bridge it was night. The thunder of traffic on the span came to them as the distant booming of guns. It brought to Mat's mind the thought of another raiding party he had led. When a squad of sand hogs, wearing the uniform of the Engineer Corps, had followed him out into No Man's Land. It had been dark then.

THE light of an automobile headlight flashed in his eyes. Instinctively he crouched and froze into immobility. He smiled when he realized that it was not a flare sent up by the Germans. Answering grins ap-

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peared on the faces of the sand hogs. Memory had made them crouch also. Mat led the way into a narrow alley. A one story building loomed before him. He beckoned to Mike Conners.

"Take your men to the rear," he instructed. "Leave three outside. When you hear us move in, join the party. See you later."

The group split. Conners's men circled the structure and Mat waited until he judged they had arrived at the back. He glanced at the windows. The shades were drawn, but the rooms were brightly illuminated. He heard the mumble of many voices coming from the house, an occasional oath. A man laughed.

He looked back at his men. They were trembling with eagerness. Their shoulders swayed slowly from side to side as they leaned forward on their toes, waiting for his word.

"Let's go!" he roared. "Tear the place to pieces!"

He dashed up the short flight of steps. His shoulder crashed against the door. It splintered. He lurched into a narrow hallway. To his right a door opened into a large room. Seated about a table was a group of men. Near them were other groups. Before they could rise to their feet, Mat was in their midst.

Behind him the sand hogs surged into the room in a billowing wave. Mat seized a chair. He laid about him with a savage fury. The wood splintered in his hands. His fist swung in a long arc and caught a gangster on the point of the jaw. There was a sound of breaking bone. The man dropped.

Suddenly a gun spat fire. A sand hog, with a shovel upraised, lurched to his knees. He moaned and his hands went limp.

"*Up—up Galway—up Galway!*" It was Joe Powers shouting the call of his clan. He seized a gangster by the throat, lifted, and bore the cursing man swiftly across the floor. The cursing ceased abruptly as the man's head crashed into the wall. Powers dropped the limp body, caught another.

"*Galway—Galway—up Galway!*" Again the cry rang out.

Twenty gunmen had been in the room. As one, they had reached for their guns. But the attack had been too sudden. A single shot had been fired and then the flailing sand hogs had been amongst them. In this seething pack of struggling bodies a gun was useless. Sand hog and gangster were so closely intermingled it was impossible to shoot. But the gangsters had knives and knew how to use them.

A shrill cry announced that a point had been driven home. Mat leaped in the direction of the call, his ponderous arms swinging. A snarling face appeared before him. A knife flashed. Mat felt a searing streak of flame circling his side. His hands closed on a squirming body. He slammed it to the floor, grinding it beneath the heels of his boots.

"*Mayo—up! Mayo—up! Mayo men!*" Mike Conners appeared in the door of the adjoining room. He threw himself into the swirling mass of men. Behind him swarmed his sand hogs. This was a man's game—fists against knives. The shovels and wrenches had been dropped—there was no space to swing them.

These wild Irishmen had but one desire. They wanted to feel the crunch of breaking bones beneath their fists. They were the men who had been beneath the river when the air failed. Death had been close at their shoulders then. Now they were faced by the men who had been responsible.

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"*Mayo—up Mayo!*" The cry rang loud. The gangsters fought desperately, but one by one they were beaten down. Some sprang toward the doors, seeking to flee from these fighting savages from beneath the river.

"Grab them, men!" cried Mat. "I want all of these rats—want them alive!"

His huge right paw closed upon a struggling gunman. His left came up in a vicious swing. It landed flush beneath the gangster's ear. The man's head jerked back. His eyes glazed.

"I'll kill you fer this!" he snarled.

The left rose and fell once again. The gunman went limp. Mat dropped him and turned—reaching out for another. But the fight was over. Slumped in grotesque fashion about the floor were fifteen unconscious gangsters.

Mat counted them and shook his head in disgust to find so few.

IN a far corner Joe Powers was seated upon the chest of a fallen gunman. His hands were tightly clenched upon the man's ears. Slowly Powers lifted the gangster's head. He thumped it heavily upon the floor. Again he lifted it, and methodically thumped it down.

"Regan, eh?" he growled. "So yer name's Regan, is it? Ye foul hearted liar! My wife's name was Regan before I married her. A grand old clan are the Regans—although I'm not afther sayin' the old man wasn't a bit too fond of his drink. But he'd turn over in his grave, so he would, if he thought the likes av you was named Regan."

Once more the head came up and was solemnly pounded upon the floor. "Speak up, ye murtherin' divil," cried Joe. "Is it Regan or is it somethin' else?"

"Hold it, Joe," said Mat. "That's the man I want."

"And do ye think his name's Regan?" asked Joe.

One eye was tightly closed, but in the other was a challenging glare.

"Of course not," laughed Mat. "But if that's what he calls himself, he's the one I want."

It was with difficulty that Mat pried Powers from his victim. He lifted the unconscious gunman and threw him across his shoulder as though he were a bag of meal. At the door he paused.

"All right, boys," he said. "Gather them up—about five of them will do. But be sure you get the other Regan. Bring them to the job."

"His name is *not* Regan!" yelled Powers. "Me wife would—"

"You win, Joe," grunted Mat. "Call him what you want, but find him and bring him along."

He stepped out into the night. He knew the sand hogs would follow his instructions and he was anxious to return to the shaft. His side was calling for attention now that the excitement of the fight was past, and he realized that the cut was deep. Suddenly he remembered the man who had gone down before the gun. He dumped Regan onto the ground and returned to the house.

"Who collected that piece of lead?" he asked.

"Shorty Bright," said Conners. "It's bad, but it could be worse. I'll take care of him."

Mat shouldered his burden and started toward the tunnel. When he stepped into the company office he found a worried and nervous general superintendent awaiting him.

"How did it go?" asked Barton.

"Smooth as silk," grinned Mat. "We've got these rats just where we want them now. Let me have that bot-

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tle. I hate to waste good liquor on this skunk, but I want to talk to him."

THEY forced a quantity of liquor down the gangster's throat and Mat hastened the process with a dousing of water. Regan blinked, coughed, and sat erect.

"Regan, you're licked," said Mat. "You tackled the wrong crowd this time."

"Wise, aren't you?" sneered Regan. "What are you goin' to do now?"

"Give you a little of what you deserve."

"Go ahead—turn me over to the cops. You ain't got a thing on me."

"Oh, we wouldn't think of doing that, Regan. You're going to be our guest for a while."

"What do you mean?" asked the puzzled gangster.

"You're going down and have a look at the tunnel. One of you rats is going to be in the heading during each shift. You may get to like it down there—you may not. But if there are any more of your mob in town that might feel like flooding the tunnel, we will at least have the satisfaction of taking you to hell with us."

"Do you think that is the right thing to do?" asked Barton.

"Certainly," replied Mat. "We've got to finish this tunnel. These gangsters will think twice before they cause any more trouble, if they know that Regan is down there with us."

"Very well, Mat," said Barton. "Have it your way. I sent for my attorney and he is taking a confession from that gunman you had in the air lock."

"Any trouble getting it?"

"No. We told him he could talk here or below the river—he decided to talk in the other office."

The raiding party had returned from the river front and as their shouts drifted in through the windows Mat rose to his feet. He opened the door and called to Mike Conners. Briefly he explained the plan. Mike nodded in agreement.

"Did you get the other Regan?" asked Mat.

"He wasn't amongst the crowd at the house," said Conners. "We had to muss them up a bit to make them talk, but I'm sure Regan wasn't there."

"That's not so good, but we'll get alo[illegible] without him. Take the ones you have down below—take this rat too. Keep them in the heading until I send for them."

"Shall we burst their ears?" asked Conners.

"No," growled Mat. "They'd probably die of fright and we want them alive until we finish the tunnel." His face was stern, set.

When Conners had left with Regan, Mat hurried to the office of the company doctor. A physician was always in attendance at the shaft as accidents are frequent on tunnel jobs. In the small building that had been converted into a field hospital, Mat found a number of sand hogs having their injuries attended to. Shorty Bright, the man who had been shot, was stretched out on a small iron cot. Shire looked at the doctor and then nodded in the direction of the injured man.

"He'll be all right," said the doctor. "Now, let's have a look at you."

He examined the knife wound carefully and dabbed at it with an antiseptic.

"Hmmm, that's pretty," he said. "A few stitches should do the trick. You must have the constitution of a horse, Mat. If I had that much steel slipped into my ribs you men would

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be taking up a collection for my widow."

He went cheerfully about his duties, and the sand hogs grinned as they told and retold the story of the fight. According to their versions of the affair, each one of them had disposed of fifty gangsters and their only regret was the scarcity of numbers of the enemy.

WHEN the doctor had finished his work, Mat thanked him and returned to the company office. He seated himself beside Barton and seemed to have difficulty in finding the words he wanted to say.

"It's about Barrie," he growled at length. "I—I can't understand it—but she says she loves me. Something has happened to me, Frank; it's driving me mad. I—I guess I'm in love."

"That might be it," smiled Barton.

"But you know the life I've led. Besides, I'm too old."

"No, you're not too old," said Barton. "You merely started living when you were a kid. When you should have been in school, you were driving a tunnel in Mexico. Since then you have packed a lifetime of action into each year. As a matter of fact, Mat, there isn't such a great difference in your ages. And if Barrie wants you—well, I've always wished you were my son."

"I'll try to make her happy," said Mat.

"I know you will," answered Barton. "And she'll probably take some of the wild notions out of your head."

"You should see what she can do with a pick handle," grinned Shire.

The telephone rang an insistent summons and Barton lifted the receiver. The color left his face as he listened to the words coming over the wire. He placed one hand against the mouthpiece and turned to Mat.

"Where's Barrie?" he asked.

"I left her here at the office. Didn't you send her home?"

Barton slowly shook his head. He looked like a man condemned to death as he handed the telephone to Shire. Mat snatched the instrument from the hands of the superintendent.

"Hello," he roared. "This is Shire. What do you want?"

"Are you the mug that started the fight at our club?" asked a snarling voice.

"Yes, I am," he shouted. "Who the hell are you?"

"This is Ed Regan talkin'. You got my brother there and some of the boys. But you ain't goin' to keep him."

"I'm not, eh?"

"No, wise guy, you're not. Because I got Barton's kid. How about a swap?"

The veins in Mat's forehead swelled until it seemed they must burst. His fingers closed around the telephone in a crushing grip as though it were the throat of the gangster at the far end of the wire.

"You win," he said. "How do we do it?"

"That's fine," came the sneering reply. "You bring Marty and the boys to the foot of Fulton Street. There's a short dock there. Wait until a car pulls alongside of you and then do as you're told."

"Not so fast," growled Mat. "You don't get Regan or any one else until the girl is safe at home. You don't expect me to trust you."

"Okay, wise guy. I'll go halfway with you. Bring Marty and I'll bring the girl. Keep the boys until she gets back to her old man and then spring them."

"It's a deal," said Mat.

"Keep the cops out of this," said

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Regan. "And don't bother tracin' this call. It's from a drug store."

CHAPTER V.

DOUBLE CROSSED.

MAT slammed the receiver on the hook and sprang to his feet. He left the office after a few words of explanation to Barton. It seemed an age before he reached the man-lock at the foot of the shaft. He stepped inside, swung the door closed and nodded to the lock-tender. The air blasted into the cylinder and the pointer of the gage rose swiftly to forty pounds.

The inner door groaned as the pressure equalized and he pushed it open.

The dimly lit tunnel stretched before him in a slight downward grade. To his right a set of narrow gage tracks led to the heading. A small electric locomotive was standing near the open door of the muck-lock. Mat ordered the driver from the seat and climbed into his place. He released the brake and threw on the power.

The heavy motor started down the tunnel. It swayed dangerously as it gathered speed, lurching from side to side on the uneven tracks, and flashed past the curved walls of the tube. Mat peered intently through the heavy haze that was caused by the rising and lowering of the air pressure. The brilliantly lighted heading seemed to rush toward him. He pulled heavily upon the brake lever and sprang to the tunnel floor as the motor came to a grinding stop.

Seated upon a pile of boards, not far from the laboring muckers, were the six captive gangsters. They huddled closely together as though for protection. Their staring eyes were fixed upon the swaying, naked shoulders of the sand hogs. The hogs were performing their duties with little thought of the gunmen.

This was the tunnel—a world beneath the river. And here a greater enemy than a few sneaking murderers was constantly at their shoulder. The river that flowed so silently above was a foe worthy of their might. A moment of carelessness, a slight mistake on the part of the miners, and the thundering flood would surge in upon them. The heat generated by the highly compressed air was terrific. The sweat streamed from the toiling men and their bodies steamed as they swung to the constant work of removing the sand.

Mat Shire strode quickly to the dejected group of gangsters. He jerked them to their feet and started them up the tunnel. Mike Connors shunted the locomotive onto another track and told a mucker to hook on a small flat-car. He swung the control and the motor leaped forward. Mat ordered the gunmen onto the flat-car and seated himself beside Conners on the motor.

"I'm taking Regan out with me," he said. "Hold these others just inside the lock. Leave them with the lock-tender and get out of the air. You've been in here too long now."

"Yeah," said Conners. "I'm starting to feel it. I wonder how those rats like forty pounds of pressure. They don't know what it's all about—it seems like a bad dream to them. But wait till they get out."

"I'm counting on that," said Mat.

When the motor stopped at the bulkhead, Mat grabbed Regan by the collar and dragged him into the lock. The lock-tender closed the door and reached for the exhaust valve.

"How much time do you want?" he asked. "The full forty minutes?"

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"Open it up wide," growled Mat. "We're going through in forty seconds."

"My God!" gasped the lock-tender. "You can't do that!"

"Open it up!" roared Mat.

The valve opened and [illegible] screamed out of the cylinder. A sudden cloud of vapor swirled about their heads as the pressure fell. It grew cold—clammy. Regan coughed.

The outer door groaned and Mat threw it open. He dragged Regan onto a cage and they rose to the gantry. The gangster was silent, but his eyes asked innumerable questions. Mat drove him along the narrow streets of the water front. At the corner of Fulton Street they turned to the left and walked out onto the short dock. Mat watched the gunman closely, searching his face for symptoms of what was to come.

A DARK sedan cruised past the entrance to the pier. It turned and the driver made a hasty survey of the surrounding neighborhood. The car rolled slowly to the dock and stopped. Mat hurried forward. The barrel of a sub-machine gun stuck menacingly through the window at the driver's seat.

"Stay where you are," snapped the driver.

"Nice work, Eddie," said the man beside Mat. He stepped forward and opened the forward door. "Hello, baby. Where did you come from?"

Barrie stepped from the car. Her head was high and her lips set in a firm line. She passed the gunman and hurried to Mat.

"I've ruined everything," she said bitterly. "Oh, Mat, I know I should not have done it. But I had to watch you. I stood in front of the house while you were fighting. Regan was running away and I yelled for the boys to get him. They didn't hear me. He recognized me and forced me to go with him."

"Are you all right?" asked Mat.

"Yes. He hasn't hurt me. But I want to get away from here quickly. Take me back to the office. We'll get father and go home."

"Wait a moment, wise guy," said Marty Regan. "You ain't goin' nowhere."

"What do you mean?" asked Mat.

"I mean that Eddie swapped the girl for me—but you're comin' with us."

Mat started toward the car. His rock-like fists reached for the gangster. The muzzle of the gun lifted to the level of the sand hog's eyes.

"Be nice," said Regan. "Just get in the back and don't try nothin' clever."

Barrie sprang forward. She caught Mat by the arm and held him tightly. Terror was written strongly across her face.

"No—no—you must not," she cried. "You can't make him—I won't let you."

"Forget it, sister," laughed Marty Regan. "He'll come if he knows what is good for him."

Mat gently disengaged the girl's hands. He held her firmly for a moment, steadying her. Then he whispered something close to her ear. She stepped back, smiled faintly and hurried in the direction of the tunnel.

Mat stepped into the car and leaned back in the rear seat. One of the Regans kept the gun trained upon the sand hog's chest and the other drove the car swiftly along the deserted streets of the water front.

They stopped before a dark, dilapidated tenement. Ed Regan sprang from

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the car and looked hurriedly about. He nodded his head. Marty directed Shire up a flight of narrow, dimly lit stairs. He prodded him insistently with the gun until Mat reached the top floor. They stepped into a room at the forward end of the hall and Ed closed the door.

"Leave him alone until we spring the other boys," he said. "He can write a note to Barton, and after that, he's all yours, Marty."

MAT sat quietly. There was a slight smile on his face that puzzled the gangsters. Marty Regan kept the gun trained upon Mat's chest and his eyes held a threat of death, definite as the gun. He sneered as Mat wrote the note that would release the gangsters held at the tunnel. When that was finished it would be his turn, thought Marty. This bruising sand hog with the heavy hands would find that death could be both slow and painful—very painful.

He played with the idea, thinking of some of the things he intended to do. A twinge of pain settled in his groin. It grew, sending burning fingers of pain up into his stomach. What did it mean? Was it something he had eaten? No—no, it couldn't be that. These pangs were too sharp. They were fierce, stabbing pains—pains that rocked him with agony.

A horrible fear seized him. The air! Somewhere he had heard that compressed air did strange things to a man. That it crippled and killed the men who worked in it. He screamed—leaped to his feet.

"It got you, eh?" laughed Mat. "How do you like it?"

"What—what is it?" cried Marty.

"You've got the bends," said Mat. "It caught you in the stomach. You were in forty pounds of air for quite a long while. I didn't give you any time for decompression. It got you."

"What'll I do?" screamed the gangster. He had dropped to the floor.

His legs were drawn tightly against his chest. His fingers were clenched about the handle of the gun. He swung it wildly on a line with Mat's head. "Tell me what to do!"

"There's only one cure for it," said Mat. "If you go back into the air again it may fix you up. That's what the sand hogs have to do."

"Take me back," screamed Marty. The frightful wrenching pains were coming faster, they felt like dozens of razor edged knives that twisted and probed. His lips flattened against his teeth. A tortured cry was wrung from his throat. He tried to stand, but could not.

"Sure, I'll take you back," said Mat. "But your brother will have to come too."

"I'll see you in hell first," said Ed Regan. "You take Marty back and do it quick, but I ain't goin' with you."

"Hurry up," cried Marty. "I can't stand much more of this. Get me back to the lock or I'll blow your head off."

The gangster was half-crazed.

"No, you won't," said Mat. "If you showed up at that job without me, the sand hogs would tear you to pieces and you know it. I'm the only one who can get you into that lock safely and I won't unless your brother comes too."

"I'm not goin'," yelled Ed. "That's final."

"You are—you are, damn you!" shrilled the tortured gangster.

His eyes were glassy and seemed to start from their sockets. The cords of his throat were drawn in straining knots. The fierce convulsions of pain

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were coming faster—sharper. He swung the gun upon his brother and a mad fury seized him.

"Nix, Marty," cried Ed. "Don't point that at me. I won't go—"

A stutter of rapid shots belched from the muzzle of the gun. Ed Regan screamed. He clutched madly at his face, from which blood gushed in a sudden spurt. He pitched headlong to the floor.

Marty Regan's mouth opened wide. His legs jerked spasmodically, thrusting his body into an upright position. The gun dropped from his hand. His fingers stiffened, clutched in claw-like talons. He twitched violently, then slumped to the floor beside his brother. The compressed air had done its work.

IN the company office at the tunnel shaft Frank Barton nodded grimly as he listened to Mat's story. Beside him stood Barrie and there was admiration in her eyes as she looked at the giant sand hog.

"It was a desperate chance," she said. "The air might have caught you too, dear."

"No, Barrie," answered Mat. "I had only been in it a few minutes. The pressure doesn't take effect on a short stay. But Regan had been down below for quite a while—much longer than he should have been. I felt sure the air would get him—it was only a question of time. I wanted you here with your father when it happened."

"I think she'll do as she's told from now on," said Barton.

He smiled as he stepped to the window and looked out upon the shaft.

"Barrie, come here," said Mat.

"Yes, dear," answered the girl.

She stepped to his side. He kissed her.

"She never obeyed her father as quickly," smiled Barton.

THE END

"Saved by a Hair"

IN the summer of 1791 General Arthur St. Clair led an American military expedition against the Miami Indians in the Louisiana Territory. The Miamis called the warlike Osages to their aid and in the disastrous battle at the junction of the Arkansas and Canadian Rivers, St. Clair's force was routed with considerable loss.

During the battle one of the Miami chieftains, Pahuska, grasped the long white pigtail of an American officer with whom he was engaged in a hand-to-hand fight. To the Indian's amazement the entire white "scalp" came off in his hand as the white man fled.

It was Pahuska's first experience with a wig. He regarded it as concrete evidence of the white man's magic. In his mind it became a charmed thing, grand medicine. Supposing that in another tight spot it would save him as it had saved the white man he had engaged in the mêlée, Pahuska clapped it on his own head and wore it always thereafter.

Early American military annals reveal the existence of an outstandingly brave Osage chief, known as "White Hair." This, it has now been definitely settled, would be Pahuska going into action with the white wig he had taken at the St. Clair rout. *Herbert E. Smith.*

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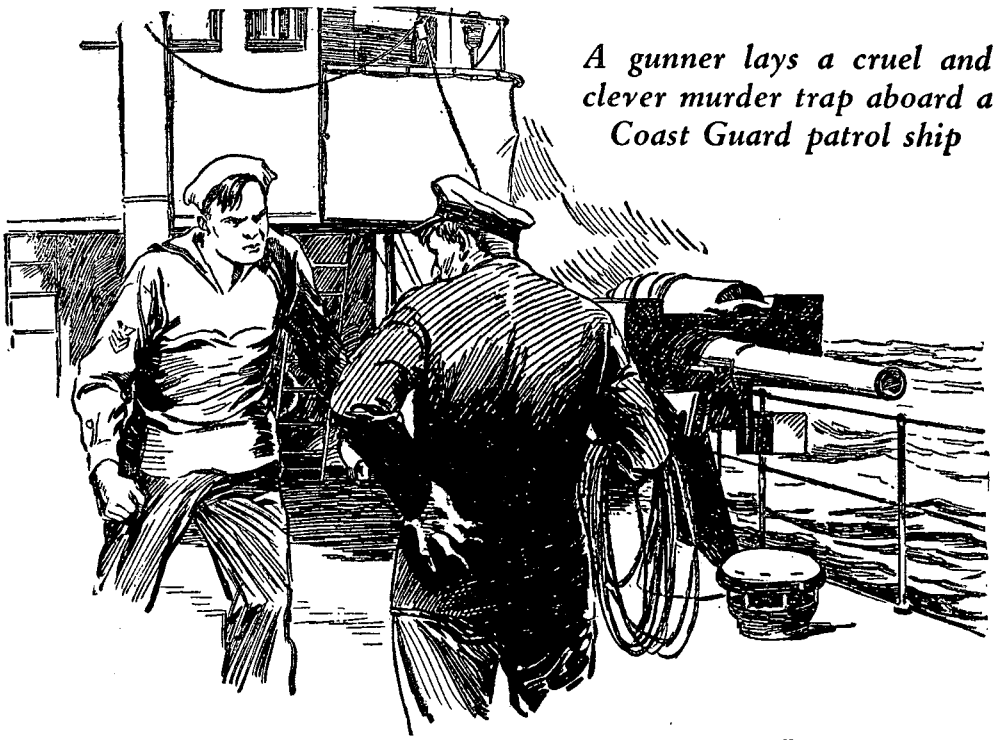
By the Deep Six

By RALPH R. PERRY

A gunner lays a cruel and clever murder trap aboard a Coast Guard patrol ship



"If you're still sore, say so, and we'll have it out"

GREGSON swung the hand lead past his head in three wide, full-arm circles and cast far ahead. The fourteen pound weight was a feather in his big hands. The quartermaster who takes soundings on a Coast Guard patrol ship speeding at fifteen knots needs to be a big man. The sun gleamed on tousled blond hair that thrust itself jauntily from beneath the white linen cap. Gregson enjoyed taking soundings, and the sea, and his time ashore, and the whole fun of living.

"By the deep six, sir!" he intoned as he bounced the lead on the bottom. With a flourish he recoiled the lead line, for the ship was safe in deep water, the harbor bar left behind. He vaulted from the chains, grinning from sheer abundance of life.

Purdy, the ship's gunner, met the grin with a glare. He hated Gregson. He hadn't intended to let his hatred show, but the quartermaster intercepted the look. With the wet lead line looped over his arm Gregson strode aft.

"Purdy," he said, "I smacked you cold last night. You called my girl a broad, and you know damn well she ain't. Just because Sue passed you up you had to smut her, and I ain't sorry I gave you what you had coming, get me? I aim to marry Sue one of these days."

Purdy's lantern jaws moved, but no sound issued. He had known that Sue and Gregson intended to marry.

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"Okay!" said Gregson. "We rushed Sue fair, and we fought fair. With me, that's that. We've got to go on being shipmates. I ain't packing a grudge, but if you're still sore, say so, and we'll have it out!"

"No," Purdy muttered. He held out his hand, but he dared not raise his eyes. They were filled with hate and the mad will to do murder. Sore? Purdy's brain was a whirl of acid, the more corrosive because he was afraid to face the quartermaster again.

"No, I ain't—*sore,* shipmate!" he muttered. Head downcast, he turned abruptly and shuffled below decks, to the gunner's workshop. He locked the door. Here he could be alone. He could sweat and swear under his breath.

Sore? If he could stamp on Gregson's face he wouldn't be sore. Why, damn them, they'd be happy. One turns him down and the other licks him, and they're happy...and there was nothing he could do. Nothing...unless he wanted to hang.

Feet thumped across the deck over Purdy's head. Gregson, the big punk, was stretching his lead line to dry before the ship returned across the bar that evening. The lead itself dangled in front of the open port of the workshop. Purdy stared at the weight, as long as his forearm, as thick as his wrist, the butt cupped to hold a bit of tallow in order to bring up samples of the bottom.

Suddenly he darted to the door and tried the lock. In that instant, with a flash of inspiration that revealed every detail, he had visualized a perfect crime.

At once he set to work. He was the gunner, with the magazine at his disposal. He was skilled with tools; familiar with intricate, deadly things. He got the gear he needed, relocked the door, and cautiously drew the hand lead through the port.

With a brace and an inch and a quarter bit he bored a hole from the butt almost to the tip, leaving the thinnest shell of metal. Into the cavity he slipped a stick of dynamite. Calculatingly he measured the fuse.

From long familiarity the rhythm with which Gregson cast the lead and recoiled the line was in Purdy's head, accurate within a few seconds. The first sounding approaching the bar, like the last leaving it, would be by the deep six. Thirty-six feet for the lead to sink, while the ship tore ahead at fifteen knots. So many seconds for Gregson to recoil the line, the lead rising slowly through the rush of water. And then, for the next five or six seconds, the lead would either be in Gregson's hands, or swinging near his face. An explosion then would blow Gregson's face off his shoulders.

Purdy cut the fuse. Even if he had miscalculated by a second or two, and the explosion took place in the water, shreds of lead would fly like buckshot. Gregson would be leaning far out over the sea. He would stagger, double over the chains, and hang there, dripping blood. The explosion might shatter a plank or two, but it would never sink the ship. The dynamite was not sufficiently confined.

And how was an innocent hand lead to blow itself to bits just at that moment, after Gregson had kept it in his locker all day, and when no hand save his had touched it at the time of the cast? Purdy smiled. How? Why, very simply.

From a shelf he took a can of the chemical used to refill patent life buoys, a powder which takes fire on contact with water. Into the cavity above the dynamite he crammed back the shav-

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ings of lead cut out by the bit, so that the weight would be approximately the same as before. The chemical, tamped in with the lead shavings, held them in place; the mixture looked exactly like the tallow and the sand from the sea bottom which had filled the cavity at the butt.

Purdy weighed the lead in his hand. He could perceive no change. The lead, in weight and appearance, was the same lead. Until it touched water. Then it would become a bomb. The explosion that killed Gregson would be inexplicable—and best of all, if the quartermaster chanced to notice anything amiss, he would bring the lead back to Purdy for repair! The dynamite was buried deep...

The sea rushed past the open porthole with a steady hiss. With the greatest care Purdy swept every shaving of lead left on the work bench into the water, and cleaned the lead-stain from the steel of the bit. Then he let the bomb swing out through the porthole, and unlocked the door.

THE acme of revenge is to watch an enemy destroy himself. At dusk, as the ship approached the harbor bar, Purdy came on deck and leaned over the rail, well aft of the chains.

Three times Gregson swung the bomb past his head with wide, full-arm circles. There was a spurt of light as the weight plopped into the sea, but every one, save Purdy, thought the flash was due to phosphorescence.

The ship rushed on. Gregson leaned far over the water to make the sounding.

"Six fathoms—and no bottom, sir!" he cried out. Surprise rang in the deep voice. "The lead didn't touch, sir!"

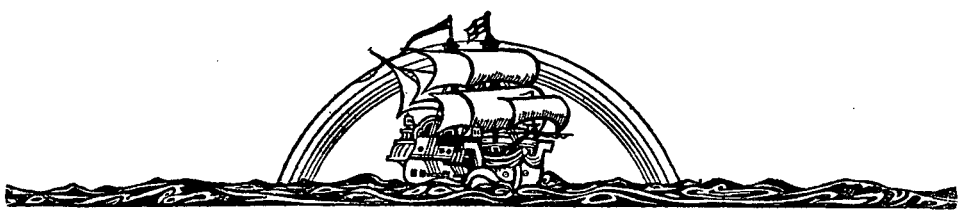
Rhythmically he commenced to recoil for the next cast. In the dark water a point of flame which looked like phosphorescence, but was not, rose toward the surface.

At the rail, Purdy uttered a yell of rage. The point of flame was not rising beneath Gregson, but well aft—further and further aft, closer and nearer each second to Purdy himself. With the lightning clearness with which the gunner had conceived his perfect crime, he saw the flaw in his calculations.

As the chemical burned, the lead shavings were dropping out of the bomb. Lighter and lighter every moment, the thin shell of metal lacked sufficient weight to hang straight up and down as the ship pulled it through the sea. The bomb was trailing toward the stern, rising to the surface directly beneath Purdy's fascinated eyes.

In no other respect had he miscalculated. The explosion drove a curl of lead through his skull. His death, and the splintered, leaking planks over which his body dangled, were ascribed by the coroner to "a mystery of the sea."

THE END



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MEN OF DARING

by Stookie Allen

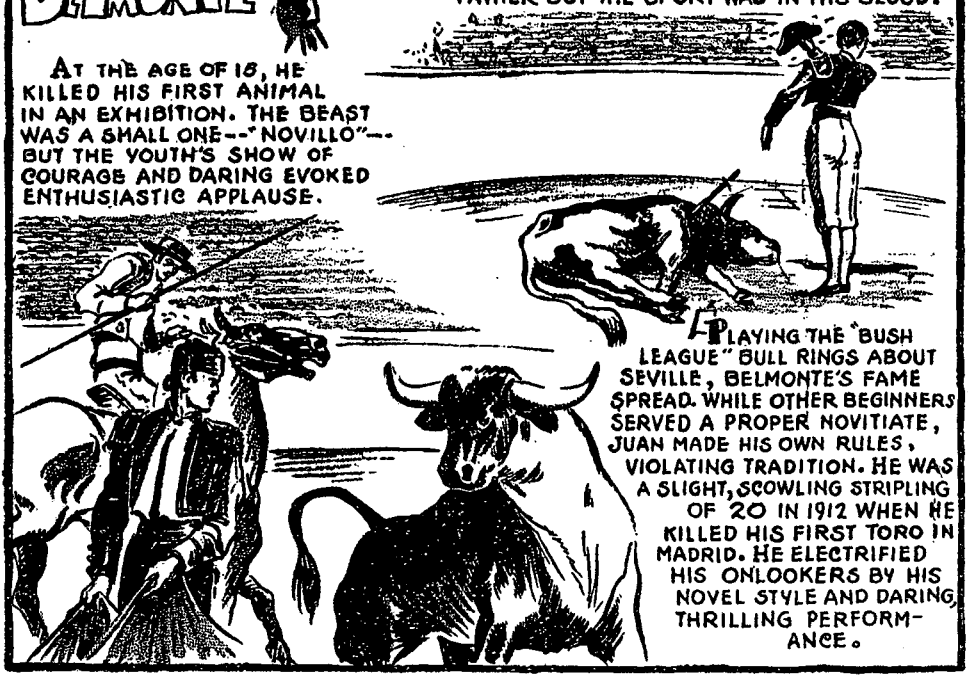
A BULL RING HERO

JUAN GARCIA BELMONTE, GREATEST OF SPAIN'S MATADORS, A CHAMPION THROUGHOUT HIS CAREER, RISKED HIS LIFE A THOUSAND TIMES IN THE COLORFUL CORRIDA. HE BEARS LIVID SCARS OF RIPS MADE BY NEEDLE-POINTED HORNS. BUT WHEN HE RETIRED A FEW YEARS AGO HE HAD CONQUERED MORE THAN 2000 INFURIATED BULLS.

JUAN BELMONTE

AS A POOR, HALF-STARVED BOY FROM THE SLUMS OF SEVILLE, JUAN HAUNTED THE BULL RINGS. SOON THE RAGGED, BAREFOOT LAD WAS BAITING EVERY OLD BULL HE MET ON THE SAND LOTS ABOUT THE CITY. IT GOT HIM MANY BEATINGS FROM HIS FATHER BUT THE SPORT WAS IN HIS BLOOD.

AT THE AGE OF 15, HE KILLED HIS FIRST ANIMAL IN AN EXHIBITION. THE BEAST WAS A SMALL ONE--"NOVILLO"--BUT THE YOUTH'S SHOW OF COURAGE AND DARING EVOKED ENTHUSIASTIC APPLAUSE.



PLAYING THE "BUSH LEAGUE" BULL RINGS ABOUT SEVILLE, BELMONTE'S FAME SPREAD. WHILE OTHER BEGINNERS SERVED A PROPER NOVITIATE, JUAN MADE HIS OWN RULES, VIOLATING TRADITION. HE WAS A SLIGHT, SCOWLING STRIPLING OF 20 IN 1912 WHEN HE KILLED HIS FIRST TORO IN MADRID. HE ELECTRIFIED HIS ONLOOKERS BY HIS NOVEL STYLE AND DARING, THRILLING PERFORMANCE.

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GALLITO, THE REIGNING FAVORITE, WAS UNDOUBTEDLY MORE SCIENTIFIC AND GRACEFUL BUT BELMONTE'S CLOSE, IN-FIGHTING STYLE—HIS KNACK OF INFURIATING THE BULL TO TERRIFIC RUSHES WHICH HE WOULD SIDESTEP CLEVERLY WHEN ALMOST AT THE POINTS OF THE BEAST'S HORNS— MADE HIM SPAIN'S NATIONAL HERO. NO FEW OF HIS IMITATORS, LACKING THE GENIUS FOR THE NEW TECHNIQUE, WERE GORED TO DEATH TRYING TO EMPLOY IT.
THRICE BELMONTE WAS ALMOST KILLED. IN 1920, AT SEVILLE, HE PERFORMED NEW FEATS OF DARING FACING THE PRIZE BULL OF ANDALUSIA. A MOMENTARY PAUSE—A SHUDDERING CRY FROM THE CROWD—AND THE ADMIRED MATADOR LAY BLEEDING ON THE SAND. HE HAD BEEN TOSSED BY HORNS THAT HAD RIPPED HIS FACE FROM EAR TO CHIN. BUT IN THREE MONTHS HE WAS BACK, MORE MAGNIFICENT THAN EVER!
AFTER HAVING RETIRED IN 1925 BELMONTE WAS LURED BACK BY AN OFFER OF 500,000 PESETAS FOR 20 FIGHTS. AT BARCELONA BEFORE SPAIN'S QUEEN IN 1927, HE WAS GORED IN THE ABDOMEN WHEN HE MISJUDGED A BULL'S RUSH. HIS INJURY WAS ALMOST FATAL, BUT AGAIN HE PULLED THROUGH. LIVING IN RETIREMENT TODAY ON AN ANDALUSIAN HACIENDA, BELMONTE STILL DRAWS CROWDS OF ADMIRERS WHENEVER HE APPEARS IN PUBLIC.

Next Week: Mabel Stark, Tiger Tamer

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Picture Rock

By FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE
Author of "Wooden Soldiers," "Forbidden Timber," etc.

"Look! There's McGrath. You've got him going!"

Jerry McGrath's Nevada mining enemy was ready to use any weapon against him—from beautiful women to bullets

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

JERRY McGRATH, who had been brought up in the East, believing his father to be dead, reached the mining town of Hobart, Nevada, just in time for the father, Snake-bite McGrath, to tell how he had been murdered by the men of Spider Darby, owner of the Jawbone mine.

Jerry's hatred of Darby became intensified when the latter prevented McGrath's body from being buried in the graveyard and caused it to be buried in unhallowed ground.

Just before the elder McGrath died, however, he told Jerry the location of the lost Phantom Lode, fabulously rich mine. He also provided Jerry with a serum that would protect him against the bites of huge spiders that infested the mine.

Most of the inhabitants of Hobart were in Darby's pay or were afraid of him, but Jerry lined up several faithful helpers. Among his men were Mike Hurley, Hal Silvers, Tim Brent, Jack Carney, and old Philo Todd, the stage-coach driver.

One of his men was a traitor, but Jerry could not find out which one was guilty.

Spider Darby was determined to get control of the mine, in which operations had been started.

He tried filing false claims, but

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couldn't get away with it. Then he sent for his daughter, Lois.

CHAPTER VIII.

A BREATHING SPELL.

"IT'S Saturday night, Jerry," Mike Hurley suggested. "Most of the boys have gone up town and it's roarin' drunk a few of 'em are about now. Why not take a bit of a breathin' spell and leave the mine? It won't run away and nobody will jump the ground with the Governor hisself ready to say it was yez what first staked it."

"And you want me to get roarin' drunk?" Jerry queried with a grin.

"Not at all, at all," Mike replied. "But me old woman is expectin' me home and if yez'll come along for a bit of a bite it's happy she'll be. And Eddie, the one what's lame, is starvin' for a sight of yez."

"All right, Mike. I'll do myself a favor and go along. I have been at it pretty steadily. I had to do something after father died. His fury over something Darby said; his dying, fighting, got under my skin. I've had a difficult time to keep from killing Darby on sight. That day's coming, and I'm going to prepare for it."

"How?"

"I'll tell you. The fact I've gone unarmed has saved me. If I'd have packed a gun it would have been a slaughter of the innocent. I wouldn't have had a chance. But things are moving along better now and I'm going to learn to shoot. If I continue unarmed it may be regarded by some as cowardice. And that's something I must avoid if I'm to get anywhere in the West. But that's in the future. Ready?"

They climbed onto a buckboard and drove the three miles separating the Phantom Lode from Hobart. Kitty Hurley was all smiles. She had packed the children off to bed with the exception of Eddie and those older. All had eaten and the table was set for three.

The eldest girl served them; such moments as this comprised Kitty Hurley's vacations.

"I was by the Darby place today," she said, "and what a grand place it would be for children. Them lawns and the swimming pool and all, and him with nobody but Lois and her away so much."

"Hang on a while longer," Jerry said, "and you can have the new house with the four bathrooms."

"It was five bathrooms," she corrected. "Don't you remember—an extra one for guests?"

"That's right. You'll get all you dream of, Mrs. Hurley," Jerry assured her.

"But it takes so long for lawns and trees to grow—'specially fruit trees. Do have some more of the gravy, Mr. McGrath," she added, suddenly noticing Jerry's second helping of potatoes was white and unsullied.

"There's a dance to-night," Eddie ventured. "Can I go and hear the music. And say, Mom, I think my fingers are working better. It seems like I played faster to-day."

"Sure we'll go to the dance, Eddie," Jerry said.

"Go clean up, Eddie," Mrs. Hurley directed. She turned to Jerry and whispered. "That's what hurts. Him always thinking his fingers are moving faster when they're slowing up, if anything. Don't I know?" she continued, growing vehement. "Haven't I checked him by the clock? It takes him

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longer to finish one of his numbers and him driving his poor fingers as hard as he can. And a smile on his little face because he thinks his fingers are going faster."

Mike lost his genial smile and looked hard at his wife. Kitty Hurley rarely grew emotional. There was nothing Jerry could say. The mother continued. "I could kill Darby," she panted. "And when the divvil dies it won't be at the hands of some man. But it'll be at the hands of some grief-mad mother or wife who has lost what she loves most in his mine."

"Shh! Kitty, darlin', the boy's comin'!" Mike warned.

EDDIE HURLEY limped into the room, face wreathed in smiles. "Jerry," he cried, "would you like to hear me play that piece again? You ain't heard it for several weeks. See if my fingers don't work faster."

Jerry, tight lipped, threw a friendly arm across the boy's shoulder. "I'd like to hear you play, Eddie, and I've no doubt your fingers are showing improvement, but we don't want to miss any of the music at the dance. Suppose we hurry along."

"Sure," Eddie agreed.

The two of them walked slowly up the street and of the pair the boy was the happier.

The dance was held at the "Opera House," which boasted a large stage where the orchestra was seated. Great actors had trod the stage. The curtain which rolled up from the bottom had descended on great plays. The lower floor was level, of hardwood and highly polished. The chairs had been stacked against the walls for the dance.

Tim Brent, dressed in his best, was seated near the stage. Jack Carney was somewhere in the saloon district, best-damned-manning, no doubt. The first violinist who modestly called himself a fiddler saw Eddie and invited him to the stage. The boy was seated with the orchestra and there he remained, flushed with pleasure and completely happy throughout the evening, and often the forged iron brace could be seen moving up and down as his leg kept time to the music.

The floor manager made his usual announcement. "We're all one big family, folks. Just walk right up to the ladies, if you don't know 'em, and ask 'em to dance. Let 'er go, Gallagher!"

With enthusiasm that never lagged during the evening the orchestra commenced the first number. The fiddles skidded and occasionally the cornetist slipped, but the music lost none of its zest. Tim Brent listened a moment, located several ladies by their voices and walked over and bowed. One of them jumped up and they were away to a heel and toe polka.

Jerry McGrath's eyes roved about, and faltered on the most attractive girl in the room. They not only faltered, but weakened. Was there a trace of a smile about those full, red lips? He wondered. "Faint heart never won and so forth," he reflected. He bowed and smiled.

"I am Jerry McGrath," he said, "and—"

"And you would like to dance," she interrupted. "So would I." She stood up, smiled and slipped into his arms.

It seemed to Jerry as if she belonged there, even when he made due allowance for the fact it had been months since he had danced with any girl. She followed his lead perfectly. She seemed slender, almost frail, yet when he was tripped by an enthusiastic

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dancer whose feet were out of control her strength was adequate to hold him up.

"When Hobart people dance—they dance," she told him. "Polkas are the most dangerous, though men have been injured in the Dan Tuckers. Waltzes are safest."

"Suppose we dance the next waltz," he suggested.

"That will be lovely," she agreed, smiling up at him.

THE orchestra put its whole soul into the waltz, the fiddler even going so far as to close his eyes. His expression was that of a girl being kissed by the right man. Jerry McGrath found himself growing romantic and pretty speeches came to his lips that had never before found utterance.

The girl looked up once or twice and the banter was gone from her lips and eyes. Her face was flushed and he thought he had never seen a girl quite so beautiful. When the waltz ended, Jerry discovered that the special god who watches over young people had led their steps to an open door. There was a balcony and a moon. His arm was about her and it seemed quite all right.

Jerry told himself it was all right. They had known each other for years and years.

For several minutes she was content to relax, then she grew practical in her study of him. She weighed him through the eyes of experience. She knew she could hold this handsome young man as long as she willed. He might try to break off. He might even go away from her, but he would come back. This she knew instinctively. A dozen young men had told her they loved her. They had told her on short notice and most of them thought they were in love.

But this was different.

Through a hectic quadrille, during which miners endeavored to stamp their boots through the floor, the two remained on the balcony. Then another waltz commenced. Without a word Jerry swept the girl onto the floor and presently he said, "Who is the little boy with the orchestra? He seems completely carried away."

"That is Eddie Hurley. He is completely carried away by the music," Jerry told her.

"Oh, he is crippled," she exclaimed. "He wears a brace."

"Yes, crippled by a cave-in in Darby's mine," Jerry said hotly. "Five hundred dollars would fix the boy up. But do you think Darby would give a dime toward the operation? Not by a darn sight."

He danced half around the room, scowling. Eddie's fingers, which were growing stiffer, haunted him. "Excuse my growling," he said, "but it stirs me up, because it was unnecessary."

"How?"

"The mine was not properly timbered. He, Darby, saves money at the cost of lives."

"Oh!"

They finished the waltz in silence. She asked him to leave her near an expensively curtained door marked, "Ladies' Parlor."

"A waltz later?" he asked.

"Yes. Suppose we make it the third waltz," she answered.

He prowled about the hall and did not see her emerge from the parlor and make her way to the balcony where she watched the dancers.

Presently Darby seated himself beside her. "Lois, you are going great to-night," he said. "That fellow is

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head over heels in love with you already."

"That is what you predicted would happen, wasn't it?" she countered.

"Yes. Does he know who you are?"

"Not yet," she told him.

"Well, don't tell him until you have to," he advised. "Unless you feel sure you can hold him."

"I can hold him," she said quietly.

HER face turned from her father's to the stage. She watched Eddie's iron brace moving with the music. "That little fellow was hurt in your mine, dad," she said. "Why don't you do something for him?"

"If I spent money on every dog that got hurt in my mine, I'd be broke," he said. "Don't worry about miners or their families. They're all...well, next to animals. Squareheads, Polacks and the scum of Europe. They know what they're going into when they take the job. Has McGrath been talking to you?"

"He said the mine isn't properly timbered," she answered.

"The timbering is approved by a resident mine inspector and that settles it. If the inspector hadn't approved the timbering I'd have been sued for damages long ago. Look! There's McGrath mooning around. You've got him going, Lois."

Jerry appeared to be waiting for time to pass. And time did pass, though to Jerry it seemed rather reluctant about it. The girl left her father and returned to the floor and he met her as the agreed waltz started. He was his old self again and she responded to his mood until he presently said, "I don't even know your name."

"Maybe you wouldn't want to know it," she suggested. "Does it make any difference?"

"I guess nothing could make any difference," he said. "Can I see you to-morrow?"

"I planned to go riding to-morrow," she explained. "I thought I might ride up Silver Creek Cañon—and take a lunch along."

"Could I join you—and bring my lunch along?" His eagerness amused her. It pleased her, too, because it was a sincere compliment.

"No, you can't bring your lunch along—I'll bring enough for two." It was just the thing to say, for it plunged him into the depths of despair and instantly lifted him to sublime heights.

"And may I take you home to-night?"

"No," she answered. "I think you you have done enough for one evening. I'll be waiting for you to-morrow morning, oh say ten o'clock, at Silver Creek bridge."

"I'll be there with bells," Jerry promised.

Before he returned home that night Jerry borrowed a saddle horse from Philo Todd.

"Now what in tarnation do you want of a saddle nag all at once?" Todd demanded.

"I've met a girl and am going riding," Jerry informed him.

"Just help yourself to that Two-bits horse," Todd said.

It was not until later that Todd suddenly cried: "Hell's bells on a pump handle! It can't be possible he's all het up over that Darby girl, can it? I'll bet a dollar against a hole in a doughnut that's what's happened. And I'll bet five dollars against the same kind of a hole Spider Darby put his girl up to it."

And so concerned was Todd over the situation he slept little the remainder of the night. When he did fall asleep he failed to waken until after Jerry

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had taken the Two-bits horse, a spirited black, and was gone.

CHAPTER IX.

A QUEER MIX-UP.

THE two of them, Jerry and Lois, stopped by a bend in the creek's flow, where lazy trout opened their mouths and food washed in; where birds sang in nodding trees and where all nature seemed in a gentle mood. Even the grim peaks notching the rare blue of the sky seemed less harsh. They stood there, like disorderly rows of broken and blackened fangs, and the ridge never for a moment lost its suggestion of a jawbone.

Patches of snow lingered in some of the deeper gulches and fed this same Silver Creek. Nor was there any silver in the creek. It was the silvery sweep of the water which had given the stream its name.

"You are a queer combination, Jerry McGrath," the girl said. "You look Western with your rugged profile, rangy body and long legs. But you act Eastern."

"I'm a bone of contention," he explained. "My father married an Eastern girl and they moved West. She was all for it. But her folks raised merry hell. Mother died about the time my sister was born and my father got into a jam. Whereupon my mother's brother, Bradner Merritt, galloped west—on a train—had my father declared unfit to raise me, and I was taken East. Everything possible was done to make me hate the West."

"And you hated it?" she asked.

"No! I refused to compliment the West by hating it. As far as I was concerned, anything west of the Rocky Mountains was a yawn—a full blown yawn and not the kind where you politely place the hand over the mouth. I was all set to become a conservative, small town banker. I was acquiring a grand austerity; children were becoming afraid of me and I was making a dignified gesture of courtship toward the girl across the street."

"What a swell future!" she exclaimed. "Go on. I love it!"

"The girl across the street was a pale-faced, highly respectable person who could trace her family—"

"Back to the Mayflower?" she said.

"Mayflower...huh!" he exploded. "Right back to William the Conqueror."

"You are not telling me a descendant of one of William's conquered is colorless?" she cried.

"Well, an evening spent with the lady could not be construed as a high peak of emotion," Jerry told her. "But it seemed to be the thing that was being done. Then I received a telegram and learned the father I supposed was dead, was dying. I came on the run, naturally. I looked around the West, saw the set-up and my blood stirred for the first time. Back East all was secure and certain. Here men were doing things. Matters were uncertain. You had a chance to lose as well as win. There were things my father wanted done and I promised to do them."

"And with what success?" she asked.

"About all that could be said of me was that I meant well," he answered.

"Damning yourself with faint praise," she ventured.

"I was pretty hopeless. But I saw things that needed to be done and I hopped to it. I'm making progress, though it's mostly because I've picked

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up some good friends. Take the Hurleys, for example. They can trace their family right back to the bogs of Ireland in three generations. But I'm for 'em because they're for me."

"And Uncle Bradner?" she asked.

"He hates to take a licking. He's never taken them, you see. He is doing all he can to prove I'm foolish. He refused to advance a dollar towards the development of Phantom Lode."

"And you need money?" she inquired softly.

"Do we? Say, we've got to get it out of the mine or we're sunk," he told her.

SHE watched him as he dismounted. He was awkward, as if he were afraid he might land in a heap. She bounced to the ground and they let their horses go. The horses exchanged glances as if to say: "This is a rare spot, we'll probably be here the rest of the day."

Lois seated herself on a log and watched the stream some of the time and Jerry most of the time. She studied him through half lowered eyes. He was so open about everything, and there was so much to be read. He had blundered at first and lacked confidence, which was not surprising. But the Western blood had whipped him along. He was gaining momentum rapidly. He was driving himself and that helped. But something in the air was sweeping him on recklessly to success or destruction.

Before the day was over he would kiss her. He did not know it, but she realized it. He would be overcome by this driving force in his nature.

"You don't carry a gun," she said at length.

"No, but I am learning to shoot. I hope I never have to kill a man..." He stopped. "Or do I hope that?" He said this more to himself than to her.

"Anyway," he went on, "a man should be prepared for anything and I'm doing a little shooting on the side."

"Where are your guns now?"

"In the saddlebag. I thought if something happened and you didn't show up, I'd ride up the cañon and blaze away at something," he explained.

She stood up. "Get them—let's see what you can do."

He walked over to his horse and brought back a pair of well worn forty-fours and belt with holsters. The belt was stiff with ammunition. He donned the weapons in the approved fashion, drew a gun and blazed at a dead tree.

"That'll never do," she objected. "The other fellow would have killed you before you got the gun out of the holster. Now try it this way."

She stood beside him and made him repeat the draw again and again. She corrected major faults and presently she was correcting merely minor faults. Finally he did it perfectly, naturally, if somewhat slowly.

"Now try drawing and shooting. Your draw ruined your aim before." The gun blazed and bark flew from the tree. "Suppose we begin by shooting from the hip. It is quicker, and split seconds count."

THEY kept at it awhile longer, then seated themselves for lunch. He tossed crumbs on the surface and watched the trout take them. And later, he did not know just how it happened, but she was standing close, smiling into his eyes. He looked at the curve of her lips and they seemed to be inviting him, or so he thought. And suddenly he threw his arms about her and kissed her. He felt her lips

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resist a moment, then respond. "I love you," he said. "It's crazy, I know. I haven't known you twenty-four hours and yet I love you. And I don't even know your name."

"You don't want to know it, Jerry," she said slowly, "but you've got to learn some time. I am Lois—Darby."

"Do you mean you're—"

"His daughter," she told him. Pain came to his face, then slowly he flushed with anger. "Jerry—" she cried. She saw he was slipping from her, erecting a barrier she might not be able to surmount in the days to come. She had delayed this hour as long as possible in the hope of holding him when it came.

"Jerry, you—" she protested.

"What kind of a game is this?" he demanded. "I understand now. I'm just a plain, conceited damn fool. I thought I was sweeping you off your feet as you swept me off my feet. No wonder you wouldn't tell me who you were."

"That was the truth, Jerry," she admitted. "I was afraid you'd go if you knew who I was. And the moments with you were so precious."

He regarded her with open suspicion. He could almost believe she meant that, it was so well said. "This is good-by," he growled, getting himself in hand. "I can't stand deceit. Leaving you is going to hurt—hurt bad, but I can't stand deceit."

He moved off and the barrier grew higher. She suddenly ran after him and threw her arms about his neck. He felt the nearness of her; the tightness and strength of her arms and then her lips. He stood for a moment, cold and indifferent and let her kiss him repeatedly. She drew back her head and watched him through heavy lidded eyes.

"Are those kisses deceit, Jerry," she asked softly, then, in sudden fury, "or are you such a fool you can't tell sincerity, love, when you see it?"

He crushed her tightly. "What a mess!" he groaned. "I love you, Lois. Love the daughter of the man I've sworn to kill."

"You've sworn to kill—Dad?" She leaped back in horror. Her little fists were clenched tightly and she beat desperately at the air. "And I've just taught you how to draw and shoot from the hip. Taught you the draw Dad taught me so you can kill him."

For a moment the two stood there, looking at each other. She was first to break the silence. "But you mustn't. You can't do that. It'll make me the murderer of my own father, Jerry. You must promise never to shoot him. You must, Jerry."

She began to sob and he took her in his arms. "It would amount to something like that," he muttered. "All right. It's a promise—I'll never shoot your father."

And presently each mounted and they rode in silence down the cañon trail.

"I can't kill him," Jerry muttered, "because she taught me the fastest draw I ever heard of. I'll have to stick to that promise."

She was thinking. "He knows who I am and I've held him. He may try to stay away from me, but he'll come back."

And when they came out of the cañon, Philo Todd, Mike Hurley and Hal Silvers chanced to see them. And Mike said, "He's with Spider Darby's girl. It's meself as always does the wrong thing at the right time. I talked him into leavin' the mine because I thought the lad needed a bit of a breathin' spell." He shook his head

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doubtfully. "No tellin' what'll come of this."

CHAPTER X.

TWENTY THOUSAND DOLLARS.

MONDAY morning there was a conference at the mine. "The time has come," Jack Carney stated, "when we've got to do a lot of timbering. We've got to lay tracks for ore cars, too. As we get deeper, Jerry, we'll need machinery for pumps, blowers and the like. If the vein goes downward we'll need hoists, cables and all that goes with it. Right now we need a better blacksmith shop and more drill steel. And we're needing powder. Say, you young squirt, are you listenin' to me or dreamin' about that waltz you had Saturday night?"

"What do you know about that waltz?" Jerry countered. "You were around knocking down wooden Indians. I'm listening to you and trying to figure how far the ore money will go towards getting what you need."

"Not far, even if it runs as high as we figure," Carney admitted. "There's some twenty-five thousand dollars a ton stuff which we've sacked. But it's only a few hundred pounds. The rest will average a thousand or so. We're up against it until we can get some supplies. The men will be needing money, too, to pay grocery bills."

"I appreciated that," Jerry answered. "It's going to be tough sledding until we get going."

"Can you borrow money from a bank?" Carney suggested.

"No!" Tim Brent roared. "We don't want money from anybody. As soon as we owe money, the lender will be scheming to get his hands on the mine. There'll be lawsuits, receivers and no end of trouble. The richest mine in the world can't stand up under fights among stockholders and outsiders. It seems like both sides always takes the costs out of the mine, win, lose or draw."

"Tim's right," Hal Silvers agreed, and others added their voices to the statement. "There's mine machinery at Hope we might pick up cheap. The mine pinched out and everything's out there on the desert rustin'."

"We'll look into that. The first thing is to get this ore to the surface. That's going to take time." The tinkle of bells interrupted Jerry's words and everybody rushed out of the cabin.

Ten perfectly matched mules, dragging several ore wagons, were approaching the camp. The animals were graduated downward from the big, powerful wheelers to the small, intelligent leaders. Each animal was sleek and well cared for. On the seat of the foremost wagon was seated Philo Todd, driving with a jerk line. Harness was oiled and polished and even the bells gleamed. "Hello, gents!" Philo yelled as the mules stopped.

"Where'd you get all this?" Jerry asked, impressed by the outfit.

"I says to myself, I says, 'Philo, there'll be a spell before the Phantom Lode will be crushin' ore in its own mill. Durin' that spell that ore'll have to be hauled to Drippin' Springs. Now don't be a five center, but step right out and take a chance. Run your face for a real team of mules and ore wagons; hire some cuss to drive stage for you and become one of the institutions of Hobart!' For once in my life I listened to good advice and here I am, yours truly, Philo Todd, Incorporated, freight and passenger business. We haul an ounce or a ton!"

Having delivered this speech and re-

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ceived due applause, Philo Todd, Incorporated, lined up his wagons near the mine mouth and drove the mules back to their stables in Hobart. He was in debt now to his ears, but he bought himself a good cigar, lighted it and strolled about with his thumbs tucked in the armholes of his vest. In time he might even wax his mustache, he thought.

TRUE to Joe Grundy's prediction to Spider Darby, the ore train left Phantom Lode on Friday morning, bright and early. For the first time in his life, Jerry McGrath appeared publicly wearing his father's faithful six-guns.

"Them guns fit him somethin' like a new shoe and don't look just natural," Jack Carney observed, "but you can break in a new shoe by wearin' it steady."

"Any more guards gettin' on this load?" Philo asked, preparing to start. "Them sacks of high grade is worth ten dollars a pound and that's worth packin' off. Besides, there's always the chance Darby may figure to take this load off our hands. He knows what it means to us."

"Jerry's thought of that," Hal Silvers answered. "There'll be a half dozen of the boys ready in a few minutes."

The half dozen presently appeared, carrying sacks of straw on which to ride. Each was armed with a pair of six-guns and several Winchester rifles lay cased on the load.

Jack Carney uncorked a demijohn of whisky.

"Here's to prosperous days," he shouted, taking a swig.

"And the best damned man who ever went before the face of a stone," Jerry added, gulping down an ounce and feeling his stomach figuratively burst into flames.

Philo gulped down a libation.

"Have another, Philo," Carney urged.

"Nope," Philo answered, smacking his lips. "It takes one drink to give me nerve enough to nurse this load down Mesquite Cañon grade. If I took two drinks I'd wreck the works." His long whip cracked and the team got under way.

Every man left behind cheered at the top of his lungs. But the man who cheered loudest was the man Spider Darby called Joe Grundy.

"Fifteen tons of ore," he was thinking. "Their all!"

The Mesquite Cañon grade was a fine example of a deer trail turned into a road. The deer made the trail with little regard for grades. The first miners packed over it, swamped out inconvenient brush and humps, then when Hobart became a camp the mining corporation with the county put on a grading crew, which scraped more humps into holes, blasted out rock, cut into banks along the cañon and called it a job.

There were horseshoe curves, double horseshoe curves, blind curves and switchbacks. There was one point where a driver could look down and see seven different road levels below him.

Shortly before noon Philo Todd and his armed guards stopped at this point and looked down. "The next half hour tells the tale," Philo drawled, as he examined smoking brake shoes and lashed a few drags.

It should have been cool up there, but a hot blast of air came from the lower country with its buttes, draws and cañons filled with dead air. A buzzard floated with moveless wings in

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the blue. Several white clouds were stranded ten thousand feet above them. The roar of Mesquite Creek over the rapids came faintly. Mesquite ended ingloriously in a desert sink twenty miles away.

PHILO TODD betrayed his strain with a heavy sigh. The future of Phantom Lode, or at least their control of the mine, depended on his driving and the safe delivery of that ore.

"Jerry," he said, and he was deadly serious, "I've taken every precaution I can think of. Equipment in the best condition, extra drags. I've got back-action attachments on all the wagons—a rig of my own in a way—so that if the wagons behind push too hard on the one ahead, brakes go on. I've got mules that all hell can't scare."

"They appear to be calm enough," Jerry admitted.

"Gunfire won't scare 'em, nor will fallin' trees, mountain lions, screamin' women, or loose paper. I've tried every trick man can think of to excite 'em, and nothing happens. More, no man can do."

"Go ahead," Jerry directed, and for the next few minutes the guards were strangely silent. The ore wagons crawled along ledges, and twenty thousand dollars worth of ore swayed and groaned over the rocky road. Wagons scraped the banks on the first turn and a stream of dirt and rocks spilled into the road. The roar of Mesquite Creek grew louder; the screaming of the brakes increased.

"Hell!" The exclamation came suddenly as Philo peered over the edge and caught a glimpse of the last level. "There's a slide down there, boys, but I guess there's enough of us to roll the bigger rocks off the road into Mesquite Creek. Funny a slide would start just that special place. You never can tell what'll let go in the mountains." The bells tinkled sweetly, lending a sense of peace and security to the wild scene. "I mind the time ten years ago," Philo continued, "when—"

Something dropped from the road above and struck squarely in front of the lead mule.

"Easy! Easy!" Philo cried soothingly. "It's all right. Only an old box. Easy!"

The men on the load grew tense; hands unconsciously gripped the edge of the wagon box. The mule calmed down, then suddenly exploded. In another instant the leaders and swiggers were in a panic.

"Hell!" Philo roared. "That's a hive of bees!"

The entire train began moving as the frantic mules sought to escape the angry insects. The impact as the hive struck the hard road had smashed the hive completely. Thousands of bees were in an uproar.

"Cut that rear wagon loose," Philo shouted, "or it'll drag everything over at the next turn."

The guards dropped from the wagons and struggled to disconnect the rear wagon. The pressure was too great for hands to remove the couplings. Philo had done that job well. Jerry yanked out his six-gun and began shooting into the wagon tongue. Six shots went into the hard wood. Then six more from the second gun. A jerk of the wagon ahead snapped the weakened tongue. The wagon ran into the bank, turned and shot over the edge.

They listened a moment, fighting off the bees, and heard the wagon strike and shatter far below.

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"Come on!" Jerry ordered. "The slide! If he piles into that he's done for!"

He slid through the brush to the next level, crossed the road, dropped into the brush and smashed his way downward. Behind him came the others, loosening a torrent of small stones in their mad progress.

He passed a rock bearing rust marks and bits of fresh iron scrapings where some one had levered the rock loose and started the slide. He understood now. The bees would start the mules running and the slide would turn mules, wagons and ore into the brawling stream.

JERRY hit the lower road and fairly bounced. The roar of the runaway ore train echoed against the face of the mountain. He could see the dust of it on the switchback above him. By coming straight down he was now at least a mile ahead of the train, but the slide was larger than it had appeared from above. He began rolling the smaller rocks into the stream.

The others appeared and attacked the slide. The roar of the ore wagons was always in their ears. Once they heard a mule scream with agony, then Philo's sharp command. He was staying with the load, risking death when he could well have jumped.

"Look!" One of the men yelled hoarsely and pointed up. The train had now descended to the level directly above them. It rounded the turn and the rear wheel of the last wagon was sliding along the edge, throwing a wave of dirt and rocks. Then it straightened out.

They turned to the larger rocks, two and three men to a rock. Then four men and finally all of them. The largest refused to move.

They tore at it with their naked hands as the thunder of the oncoming train grew louder. Perspiration poured down their faces and their eyes seemed to protrude from the strain. It seemed as if their muscles must give way.

"Heave! Heave!" Jerry panted, and they applied their strength in unison. They got the rock on edge, then pushed, backs and legs bending under the strain. It turned suddenly and left them sprawled in the dirt.

They got up as the rock splashed into the creek. The train was coming now, the mules at a dead run and Philo Todd talking to them. The wheels were locked and the wagons slued ponderously about.

"We've got to get these two rocks off," Jerry shouted. He grasped the nearest and strained. One of the men caught his foot and dragged him from the road. It was just in time.

They flattened against the bank as the leaders hit what was left of the slide. The leaders and most of the swingers stayed on their feet, but one swinger and two wheelers went down. They dragged along in the harness, then the wheels hit the obstruction and the ore wagon lurched upward. Philo Todd almost left the seat. But he continued to talk. The front wheel of the next wagon hit the largest rock and crumpled. The train rushed on for several hundred yards before this added drag stopped it.

The men came running up and caught the mules by their heads. The down mules just lay there breathing hard and rolling their eyes. Philo Todd came running up. The strain of the drive was still on him. His face was white and the lines around his mouth were tight.

"One busted wheel; one lost wagon, and three skun up mules," he said.

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"It could have been worse. Several times I sure thought it was the end of Philo Todd Incorporated." He said it nervously, for he was beginning to relax. "If you hadn't gone down and cleared off the big rocks the whole shootin' match would've gone into the crick. You used your head that time, Jerry."

They got the mules to their feet and dragged the load to a wide place, then unharnessed them and looked for injuries. Two of the men worked their way along the creek bottom and found the wreckage of the wagon that had dropped from the upper grade.

There was not much left, but they found wheel parts, which they carried back to Philo Todd. He spent the remainder of the afternoon repairing the broken wheel, then dropped it into the creek so that the wood would swell and be tight against the tire.

AT daybreak the following morning they resumed the journey to Dripping Springs. The loose ore was loaded onto a waiting car, and Jerry accompanied it to the mill. The men went back with Philo Todd. Jerry McGrath returned to Dripping Springs later.

With time on his hands until the mill reported how the ore ran, he hired a rig and drove to Hope with the owner of the abandoned mine. There was everything a mine in its initial development required, and an attempt had been made to protect the machinery.

"I may be able to use it," Jerry informed Kimball, the owner. The prospect of getting a little money out of what might be a total loss was rather pathetic. He was almost ready to bow and scrape, or kiss Jerry's hand. "What do you want for it?"

"Fifty thousand dollars," Kimball said. He seemed almost frightened; then said, "Forty thousand, come to think of it."

"Your only chance to get anything is to sell it to me, or somebody who may make a strike in this vicinity," Jerry said. "It's going to cost money to dismantle the machinery and freight it to Hobart."

"Make an offer," Kimball answered. "A bird in the hand is worth a couple in the sagebrush."

"Twenty thousand dollars. If I take it. I'll pay five thousand in cash and give you a year's note for the remaining fifteen thousand dollars."

Kimball acted like a horse trader. He squatted down and began whittling on a stick. "Suppose you take the machinery over there and set it up, then go busted. I'll still own it, but look where it'll be." He shook his head. "I can't do it. Tell you what I will do. Give me ten thousand cash and a year's note at ten per cent."

"That's a deal," Jerry agreed after a moment's reflection. "I'll let you know in a few days."

The two of them returned to Dripping Springs in a happy mood and Jerry caught a ray of golden sunshine in the mill's report. The ore, with milling costs deducted, shaded twenty-one thousand dollars and a check for that amount awaited his order. Darby owned the Hobart bank, and Jerry opened an account at Dripping Springs the moment the check arrived.

As he emerged from the bank he ran into Philo Todd Incorporated.

"Just the man I'm looking for, Philo. You get check number one for hauling that ore. How're things at the mine?"

"That's why I'm here, Jerry. They need powder and steel badly. Timber

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is needed for square sets, too. And that isn't the worst of it, either. You might as well have the bad news now as later. There's a jasper named Hallock, the resident mine inspector and one of Darby's bosom friends."

"I've seen him."

"Well, he's been snooping around, and we think he's all set to make things tough for us. In rock that's faulted an inspector can make it mighty tough, too."

"What do you think of paying twenty thousand dollars for Kimball's machinery at Hope, Philo? Do you know anything about it?"

"I ought to; I hauled it out there," the other answered. "That's dirt cheap, Jerry. On the other hand, it ain't worth anything where it is now."

"Then I'll close the deal with Kimball right now and you can begin hauling the machinery over to Phantom Lode," Jerry suggested. And as Philo thought well of the idea, Jerry hunted up Kimball. Check number two bought needed Hope machinery before the sun set that night.

CHAPTER XI.

HALLOCK SPEAKS HIS PIECE.

WHEN Jerry McGrath returned to Phantom Lode the entire mine crew was either loafing about Hobart or whiling away time near the mine. The Phantom's Three Musketeers, somewhat the worse for whisky, greeted him in a body. The blind Brent was in the lead, Jack Carney next, then Hal Silvers with his hairtrigger smile and thin face bearing an expression of welcome and relief.

Brent shook hands. "There's hell to pay, Jerry," Tim said.

"We've got a little money in the poke, boys," Jerry answered. "So maybe we can pay." He looked about the mine. "I'd say somebody had called a strike."

"It's Hallock," Silver exploded. "He made an inspection; snooped all over the mine, then ordered us out until it is timbered to suit him. All that old stuff the Indians put in must be replaced, he says." Silvers lowered his voice. "Here he comes now, and he's got to be handled with gloves."

"There's one cuss I'm in no mood to handle with gloved hands," Jerry said as he walked toward Hallock. He was pleasant enough, however, as the inspector spoke.

Hallock was Jerry McGrath's build, but heavier. His manner was insolent and overbearing. His jaw was heavy and ugly.

"He's stubborn," Jerry thought, eying the jaw. Hallock's nose was large and rather flat. There was no friendliness in his gray eyes. His neck was short, so short that he partly swung his shoulders in looking about. Jerry acknowledged the inspector's terse greeting, then waited.

"I've shut down your mine, McGrath," he said in an officious tone. "It's got to be timbered according to law."

"I'll timber it according to law," Jerry answered evenly, "and I've read up on the law. I'll do no more than that."

"I'm the judge of what's proper here," Hallock snapped. Red showed around his neck. He was surprised at Jerry's stiff attitude.

"Now let's understand each other, Hallock, right at the start," Jerry said distinctly. "You've let Darby get away with murder. Yes, that's a strong word—but it amounts to that. There have been cave-ins and men killed. They

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don't dare bring suit because you step in and say the mine was properly timbered."

"Who the hell do you think you're talking to, McGrath?" the astonished inspector snarled.

"You," Jerry answered. "Now, as long as you inspect as an inspector should, we'll get along fine. But the minute you play Darby's game and start making things tough and expensive at Phantom Lode, you and your office are going to get an airing. That's all!"

Jerry turned and walked away.

Hallock stood with legs apart and feet well planted for several seconds. He seemed uncertain what to do. Then he caught the grins on the crew's faces. He turned quickly and stalked away.

Tim Brent sauntered over to Jerry. Tim's face was filled with concern. "That was sure talkin' to him, Jerry," he said, "but you've made an enemy in a bad quarter."

"I don't think I've made matters any worse," Jerry said in defense of his attitude. "He's hand in glove with Darby in the first place. Therefore he's out to do us dirt. He'd go the limit. If I fight back at the start he may ease up a bit. He may even give us a fair deal."

"I hope it turns out that way," Brent said dubiously. A grin slowly spread over his partly upturned face. "That was sure funny. Hallock gets all set and speaks his piece, then you up and take the play away from him."

THE following day Jerry sent most of the crew over to Hope with orders to begin dismantling the machinery. Others were sent with Philo Todd to haul in mine timbers, and the remainder stood guard at the mine. A Darby man had been planted among his men, Jerry knew, and he was giving no man a chance to set off a blast in Phantom Lode without the risk of detection.

Hurley, Carney and Silvers had all expressed the opinion their number harbored a spy. And they were working together in their own way to detect the man.

When Jerry found time to visit Hobart he found Kitty Hurley rather worried. Eddie was losing the use of his fingers. Even the boy realized the bitter truth. His usual smile was gone and his face was drawn and tragic.

"Gee, Jerry," he said, "it don't sound like a tune when I play any more—it's just notes. They're so far apart they don't seem to belong to each other."

"It is just temporary, Eddie," Jerry assured him. "When the mine is in production, the doctor will fix you up in a hurry."

Inwardly he was worried. He was immensely fond of the boy and his condition was serious, the trouble progressive. Delay in giving him expert attention might result in permanent disability.

Mrs. Hurley watched Jerry closely as he talked and when the boy left the room she said, "You don't believe all you told him. You're as worried as I am."

"I'm worried, but I am also confident better days are ahead for all of us," Jerry insisted. He talked at some length without actually cheering Kitty Hurley, then left, promising to keep in close touch.

The five hundred dollars necessary to send Eddie to a San Francisco specialist was not much, yet every dollar was needed to get the mine into production. But for Hallock's ordering the old workings retimbered they

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might have gone ahead, worked the vein and operated on a pay-as-you-go basis.

Pondering on his many problems, Jerry almost passed Lois Darby without seeing her.

"The Thinker is supposed to rest his chin on his fist and his elbow on his knee, Jerry," she told him brightly. "Thinkers don't go about blundering into objects and ignoring their friends. I am a friend, am I not, Jerry?"

"Of course you are," he said.

"Been working hard? Of course. And you've got lots of worries. Suppose we pack a lunch and—"

"And ride up Silver Creek Cañon next Sunday," he interrupted.

"Will you?" Her eyes were bright with hope, her lips parted in eagerness. She was fresh and vivid. To Jerry she was a needed tonic and it was easy to forget she was Spider Darby's daughter and had not yet proved to be the friend she pretended to be.

"Just try and stop me," he answered.

"There's a dance Saturday night," she ventured.

"Get thee behind me, Satan!" he answered. "I'm tempted, Lois, but it can't be done. Things at the mine are a bit critical. But I'll see you Sunday morning—the same time, and at the same place."

"Good-bye." She blew him a kiss and a moment later was galloping down the road on a mean-eyed mustang that seemed bent on her destruction.

Darby had observed the meeting from his veranda seat, where he spent much time watching, like a fat-bodied spider in his web. When Lois returned home and had turned the thoroughly subdued mustang over to a wrangler, he called her. "How are things progressing with McGrath?"

"We're getting along fine," she answered.

"He trusts you?" Darby asked sharply.

"I hope so!" She tossed a white Stetson into a chair and wiped a moist forehead. "He tries to keep away from me, and does to some extent by working like a mule in his mine, but—"

"He always comes back," Darby chuckled. "That's the idea; keep him coming. And remember you're my heir. What you win for me in this fight you win for yourself. What you lose... may be everything."

"You have said that before."

"I don't want you to forget it for a moment," her father said heavily. "Later I want you to pick quarrels with him; keep his mind in constant doubt. And I'll want you to shake certain information out of him. You can do it. You can do anything with a man."

Again his eyes glittered and he rubbed his hairy arms with that curious movement so suggestive of a spider spinning a web.

Involuntarily she shuddered.

"Don't look at me like that!" she sharply protested.

"Hell, you're beautiful! Hasn't McGrath told you so?" And his sharp, protruding eyes were probing.

"He has told me so—many times," Lois replied.

THE first of the mine timbers were delivered Saturday morning and Tim Brent called a conference of Jack Carney, Hal Silvers and Jerry McGrath.

"I've been thinking, boys," Brent said. "A blind man has lots of time to

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think, you know. We'll start timbering that mine, but we'll also sneak a crew of drillers in and start 'em getting out ore."

"That's a good idea," Silvers agreed. "But some of the men will talk, or Joe Grundy, that's supposed to be among them, will know all about it and get word to Darby. Then Hallock will be on our necks."

"We'll pick our crew and keep 'em in there," Brent declared. "We'll send 'em in at night, after the boys have knocked off for the day; we'll do our blastin' at night and maybe we can get ten or fifteen thousand dollars' worth of ore out. That'll put us in the clear."

"Let's do it!" Jerry said. "I'll take the responsibility if we're caught."

"We'll send 'em in Sunday night," Brent suggested. "Jack and I'll be one drill crew. Silvers can pick him a pardner and make up a second crew. Hurley and his pardner will be the third. The gang setting timbers can block up the tunnel and Hallock won't be likely to go beyond where they're working." Brent chuckled. "We'll lick Darby yet."

"We'd better get our steel and powder in there a little at a time, so as to not attract attention," Silvers urged. "We'll need grub and blankets."

"Go to it," Jerry ordered.

Sunday morning gave them the best opportunity to take the needed supplies into the mine, as the majority of the crew were sleeping late. Tim Brent felt his way down the trail to Jerry's cabin and looked in.

"Morning, Jerry," he said. "I hear you're going off on a picnic. Who is the girl—Lois Darby?"

"That's correct, Tim," the younger man replied.

Brent hesitated a moment. He presented a picture as he stood, filling the doorway. The early morning sun flooded his white hair and deepened the lines on his fine, rugged face. It was a kindly, strong face and suffering had added something beautiful to it.

"There's one privilege I ask of you, Jerry," he said at length.

"It is granted before you tell me what it is, Tim."

"I ask the privilege of always telling you what I think and feel. Blindness has sharpened my instincts. My hunches are always right. I can't see the deceit or the guile on the faces of people, I can only weigh the facts. I am like Justice—blind."

"Yes, Tim."

"This girl of Darby's worries me, Jerry. When I speak of her I realize I am on dangerous ground." He paused again.

"A boy in love is a poor judge of a girl. He wants to believe in her. It is a fine thing. He wants to confide in her and tell of his plans. That is a fine thing, also."

"I understand that angle, Tim," Jerry confessed. "That's the way I feel about Lois."

"Jerry, she can't be loyal to her father and to you. It is impossible. She can't be neutral, even. Think it over, son. And be careful of what you say."

"Thanks, Tim. Any time you have anything on your mind, speak up. I'll understand."

Tim Brent crossed the room and threw his big arm across the younger man's shoulder. His fingers sank deep into Jerry's arm.

"You're a fine lad," he said. Then he hurried away, walking rapidly, avoiding obstacles in his amazing manner.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

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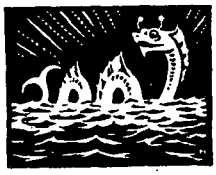
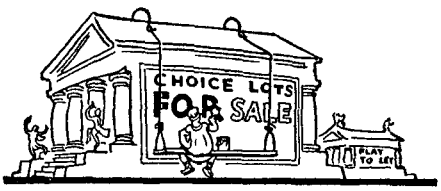
STRANGER *than* FICTION



By JOHN S. STUART

A RECORD FOR FALLS

THE present day desire to surpass all known records has left its impress on the famous Alps in Europe. Up until 1926, the fatalities never exceeded fifty a year. Since then over one hundred people have perished each year in the ascent, except in 1928, when there were only eighty-seven unfortunate climbers.



POMPEIIAN BILLBOARD

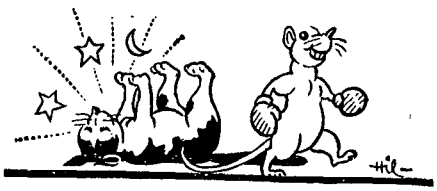
IN the ancient cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum, real estate advertisements were painted on the sides of buildings. Perhaps that was where Barnum got the idea.

THE FIRE DEPARTMENT PAYS

THE fire department of the city of Cincinnati has suspended rewards for information leading to the arrest of persons turning in false alarms. They have discovered that a racket depending on the fire alarm system for its success has been practiced recently, the deception being something as follows:—One negro owed another $10. The debtor turned in a fire alarm; the creditor gave the information to the police, and subsequently collected the reward, which was $10; and the debtor was then boarded at the state's expense. The only mistake they made was that the creditor came to visit the debtor in prison, to thank him!

THE DEAD SEA COMES TO LIFE

THE Dead Sea, 1300 feet below sea level, with a summer temperature of 120° to 130° F., has suddenly blossomed out as a health resort. It all started when a potash company began taking from the place certain potash salts for fertilizing, and found that their workers were considerably benefited by the atmosphere. Now, many health seekers are discovering for themselves the beneficial effects of the vicinity, where there are no mosquitoes or sand flies; where the air is dry and beneficial, and the water radio-active. To reach Kallia, as the resort is called, the patient takes a bus which goes around the Mount of Olives, past the Garden of Gethsemane, through the wilderness of Judea, and out on the Jericho road past the Apostles' Fountain and the Good Samaritan's Inn.



RATS WHIP CATS

TWO cats in the guise of self-appointed police recently descended upon a closed grocery store in Long Island. The forces against the law consisted of nine large river rats who had stopped in for some illicit food. During the battle, flour sacks were ripped open, and the scene soon became hidden in a white cloud. When the flour settled, the cats were discovered dead at their posts—and the nine rats were continuing with their pillaging.

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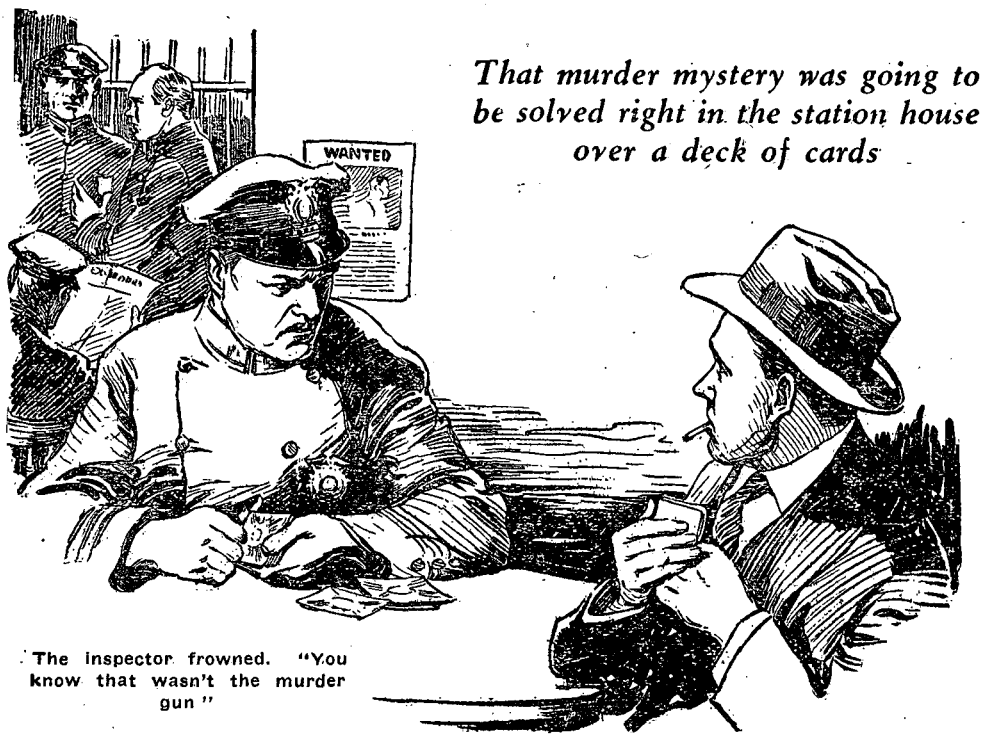
Wise Guy

By J. W. KELLY

That murder mystery was going to be solved right in the station house over a deck of cards



The inspector frowned. "You know that wasn't the murder gun"

THREE policemen pushed back their chairs and walked away from the table. Only the uniformed inspector and young Gerry, the ugly but dapper little reporter, were left.

"And you," the inspector ruled, "owe me two bucks . . . Guess I'll claim it now and try to collect, if I can. I hear you've been going down plenty on the tables at Joe's place. Sort of steep on what the *Courier* pays you, isn't it?"

Gerry groaned. "I should have been a cop. You guys are stupid! I could have been a sensation. Could have made a lot of gravy, too." He pulled a wad of bills out of his trousers.

"Tell you what I'll do," he offered. "You tell me your latest headache—I'll give it an application of real brain power and solve it for you without getting out of this chair. Then we'll call it square. Is the Henley case worth two bucks to you?"

The inspector eyed him narrowly. "What do you know about the Henley case?"

"Not a thing, thanks to you. All that I really know about it is that you've tried to make a mystery out of the mess—guards around the place, and all that sort of thing. The *Courier's* getting down on you, too, because you won't give us anything. You're not forgetting that there's an election coming up in a month, are you?"

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"Maybe I haven't got anything to give you boys."

"Then you're a fool. It's an open and shut case. Any one can see that. You know, I'd just like to show you what horse sense can do to one of your mysteries. Trouble is, you're just trying to make the thing complicated, and it isn't that kind of a case. I'd 'solve' the thing for the *Courier,* but—well, I like you, Shayne—and I owe you two bucks. The *Courier's* a lousy rag, anyway. I'm going to throw this job over in a day or so and go to the city. Real opportunities there, Shayne—real opportunities. I'm a wise guy."

The inspector chuckled. "Sometimes I wonder . . . Well, if you know so much, where is the gun that Henley was shot with? Knowin' that might help us some." He added, inaudibly, "Slow, reporter—slow."

"You found a gun, didn't you? What more can an honest police inspector want?"

The inspector, frowning, gathered the cards that were left on the table. "You're a big help. You know as well as I do that that wasn't the murder gun."

"It's a .22, isn't it?"

If the inspector was surprised, he didn't show it.

"Sure, but don't be a sap! There's more than one .22 in this man's world. Besides, this gun belonged to Henley's secretary, and I'll swear to my dying day that that old coot never so much as shot a squirrel. Used the thing for target practice, he said, and there's half the town that's seen him potting away at tin cans."

GERRY laughed his derision. "Do you mean to tell me that you think you can tell a murderer by looking at him? No wonder the police force in this burg never gets to first base! Don't you know that Henley's secretary is the only one who could have pulled that job? What are you counting on—spooks?"

The inspector shuffled the cards; when he spoke the words came slowly. "You know," he said, "that's what I thought at first—before I had seen the old duck. It was the natural thing. There were just the two of them living in that lonely old house, Henley and his secretary. Henley was rich as bugs, and there was all of that dough gone . . . Irritable fellow, too, I've heard. And that old coot could have knocked him off any moment he took a mind to. Easiest thing in the world, with them a mile or so from town." As he paused, Gerry smiled his satisfaction.

"That's just the angle I got," he said.

"Wait a bit. Wait a bit." The inspector was shuffling the cards as though his life depended on it. "I haven't finished yet. I had a talk with the old buzzard not long after I got up to the house. It didn't take me a minute to see that he wouldn't hurt a flea. It takes a certain kind of man, Gerry, to kill, and this fellow just isn't that kind. I knew that right away."

"Rats, inspector! You've forgotten about the gun."

"That's what you think, but I haven't. I grant you that it was his gun, and when we found it in his closet under a bunch of old clothes I had my doubts again. I got to admit that it looked like it had been cleaned just a little while before—there was new oil inside the barrel. It had been shot, too."

"But there weren't any fingerprints, were there?" Gerry stated rather than questioned.

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The inspector eyed him keenly. "Not a print. That made some of the boys sure it was the murder gun. There's usually prints all over an innocent gun."

Gerry took a cigarette from the inspector's pack that was lying on the table.

"He wiped it off before he did it, of course. Even a secretary would have sense enough to do that."

"Yeah, that seemed to be the answer, although it didn't seem just right to me. The boys thought the case was over, but I had a feeling in my bones that everything wasn't like it looked on the surface."

"'Police Inspector Shayne suffers divine inspiration!' Gerry jeered. "That'll make a great lead for an extra edition." The inspector smiled, a little sadly.

"Wrapped up in your job, aren't you, Gerry? Well, no matter. You see, wise guy, this fellow had a good alibi."

"They always do. What was it this time?"

"Oh, anybody could have thought it up, but I got the idea that the thing was straight when the old coot told it to me. Maybe I'm getting soft. Anyway, he told me that Henley sent him up to the city on business yesterday morning, and he didn't get back until a little after nine last night when he discovered the body. We got there almost as soon as he called us up, and Doc White said that the corpse had been a corpse for at least four hours when he got there. Naturally, if the old coot's talking straight, there isn't a shadow of doubt that he's as innocent as you or I. We've got a man in the city checking up on his story this very minute."

Gerry laughed uproariously. "How you ever got your job, I don't know. You'd fall for anything!"

THE inspector continued to shuffle the deck. "Maybe so," he granted, "maybe so. But I'm not so sure . . . I was going to tell you—we got the bullet. I mean, Doc White did. The murder gun was never in the old coot's hands.

"Well, the bullet might have come out of the .22 that we found in the closet, but the shell—and it was lying right in plain sight before the dead man—the shell had never been in that gun. The firing pin made a little rectangular dent in the rim of that shell, and the firing pin of the old coot's rifle was V-shaped! Now, where's your old solution? You'd better give me my two bucks like an honest man and leave the sleuthin' to me."

"*You* don't seem to be getting very far," Gerry sneered.

"I may," the inspector smiled easily, "be getting farther than you think . . . I'll have to answer that telephone. I do everything around here. You solve the crime until I get back. You're a wise guy."

When the inspector returned to the table a few minutes later there was a story in his face that Gerry was unable to read.

"Is it anything that I can use?" he wanted to know.

"Always hanging around here looking for a loan and a story." The inspector laughed a trifle grimly, took his chair, and returned to his incessant shuffling. Suddenly he stopped, looking at his hands with disgust. "You've been an influence on me, Gerry; I'm getting self-conscious of my hands. Got that nail file you're always fooling around with?"

Gerry tossed it across the table, and

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then hesitantly reached for it again, but the inspector, apparently not noticing, picked it up.

"Well, reporter, I suppose I *will* have a story for you pretty soon. That is, it will be ready to break in about ten minutes—if not sooner. I'll let you in on all the inside stuff then. Have you solved my murder?"

"Maybe not to your satisfaction, but to mine. I think I can tell you how the thing was done."

"Go right ahead."

"First," Gerry said, "let me ask you one question. Did you find any other clues? Beside the gun, I mean."

"Thousands of them, Sherlock. My boys went over the whole house with a fine-toothed comb . . . Even got a blond hair—*cherchez la femme,* you know—and picked up some steel dust out of the old coot's bedroom rug. No doubt that dust will come in handy for you. Got some of it here in an envelope, as a matter of fact." The inspector patted a pocket.

"Do you know what that means?"

"I can guess, but it would be a lot more fun to have you tell me, Sherlock."

"He—" Gerry caught himself, and then plunged on. "He filed the firing pin down after he killed his boss! Even a dumb cop should be able to see that." He spat the words contemptuously. "That clinches it! It's as plain as the nose on your face!"

"Well, I'll be damned!" The inspector was obviously astounded. "The old coot! Go on. What did he do next? You're a marvel, reporter."

"Why, I suppose he was rushed for time, so he stuck the gun in his closet and beat it off to the city to establish an alibi."

"Sort of careless of him to leave those filings on the floor, wasn't it? You'd think he'd have had a little more sense . . . It's almost always carelessness of one kind or another that gives away a murderer, Gerry. Carelessness, and the silly exhibitionism that makes a lot of them hang around the scene of the crime . . . This guy should have had more sense."

Gerry twitched in his chair. "He hasn't got a grain of sense," he burst out. "That's what makes it all so obvious! Are you going to let him escape?"

"He won't escape," the inspector reassured him quietly. He looked absently at the file for a moment, and then dropped it on the table.

"Gerry, do you see this cannon?" He pulled out a heavy revolver.

"Of course, I see it. Another murder gun? Put it away. You might hurt some one."

"I haven't any idea of putting it away, Gerry. The muzzle of this little sweetheart is pointing right at your heart. If you move, there's a slug of lead that's going to tear through you like a red-hot poker.

"And here's the story that I promised you. One little reporter and a bad run at cards were equal to one dead man and a good deal of missing cash. The only hitch was that the little reporter was careless enough to know more than he was supposed to. Yeah, he was a wise guy, but he forgot that he'd ruined his nail file, and he didn't know that there were some tiny filings on it that never came off a finger nail . . . That phone call was from Harra, in the city. The old coot's alibi holds water . . ."

The inspector has always been slightly regretful that Gerry moved just then.

THE END

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The Barbarian

By F. V. W. MASON

Author of "Elephant Ju-Ju," "Captain Redspurs," etc.

Where the legions of Rome had failed, Cealwyn the Northerner was making a single handed attempt to capture Syracuse

Hand over hand Cealwyn climbed—toward what fate?

LEADING UP TO THIS CONCLUDING INSTALLMENT

WHEN he was captured in his native England and taken to ancient Carthage, Cealwyn, son of a king, was made a slave. Joining with Varro, a Roman slave, and Lycursus, captain of the Spartan mercenaries in the city, he led a revolt. They escaped, but separately, and Cealwyn took with him Valeria, a Roman slave girl.

Cealwyn and Valeria made their way to a near-by island, where Cealwyn joined a pirate crew. The pirates' ship, searching for loot, encountered the galley of Adherbal, one of the rulers of Carthage, and the man Cealwyn had

This story began in the Argosy for May 19.

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sworn to kill. Adherbal, the suffet, and Tiratha, the Suffeta, were taken prisoners. The beautiful Tiratha professed love for Cealwyn, and, although he did not return it, he managed to have her life spared.

The pirates fell out among themselves. After a battle, they departed, leaving Cealwyn unconscious on the beach. Valeria nursed him back to health, and the two of them were picked up by a passing Roman scout galley, whose commander recognized Valeria as a princess.

The Roman galley was headed for Syracuse, on the shore of Sicily, an ally of Carthage that was being besieged by Rome. In a great naval battle, Cealwyn became separated from Valeria, and was picked up by a Roman commander who ordered him hanged as a slave who had stolen Roman armor.

CHAPTER XXVI *(Continued)*.

OLD FRIENDS.

FAINTLY, the threshing of oars broke in upon Cealwyn's consciousness and his smoke-reddened eyes noted the approach of a line of Roman biremes which, having disposed of their enemies, were hurrying to join in the attack on Syracuse.

Four ships threshed by and Cealwyn was about to turn away when the fifth galley in the Roman line caught his attention. Strange, he had an impression of having seen it before somewhere. That green swan's head on the aplustre? The Vesta? No. That pirate galley which had been Verceterix's? No. Suddenly he had it. Great gods, it was the galley Varro and Lycursus had selected for the escape from Carthage!

"Stand fast, rogue," growled the marines when Cealwyn squirmed sidewise to get a better view. "You'll have all the sky to yourself in a minute."

The line was passing a good hundred yards to the starboard, too far to be sure, yet he thought to recognize a straight-backed form on the afterdeck.

"Varro!" he screamed suddenly. "Varro! Help me! I—" Then a horny hand was clapped over his mouth.

Thump-thump! Thump-thump! The galley with the green swan's head was by and pulling strongly.

"Who cried for Varro?" It was the gray haired Roman with the bandaged head who came striding forward again.

"This murdering lout of a slave, O noble Lucius."

Cealwyn suddenly succeeded in sinking his teeth in that hand which muffled his mouth and seized the opportunity to call out.

"Varro and I—slaves—Carthage together. He knows me."

It seemed an eternity that the bireme commander hesitated, than over his shoulder he called an order to the galley's trumpeter who picked up his curving instrument and sent five short notes winging over the water.

"If you have lied," the gray haired officer promised grimly, "I'll have you flayed alive!"

CEALWYN bit his lips while the bireme with the green swan's head circled left in obedience to the trumpet call and, after avoiding a smoldering quinquereme, drew alongside. What if he had mistaken that figure on the stern?

Quickly, his suspense ended when the figures on the stern could be seen in greater detail; there could be no mistaking the enormous bulk of Lycursus in his typically Grecian armor, nor the ex-tribune's erect figure clad in a severely plain lorica.

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Great was the rejoicing which ensued when the two clambered up to the bireme's deck. Apparently Varro and Cealwyn's captor had once known each other, for they saluted and then nodded. But when Lucius held out his hand the man of Cannæ shook his head and dropped his eye.

"I am not worthy, noble Lucius," he muttered.

The other shrugged unhappily as he said, "Yet Marcellus now thinks the men of Cannæ fit to die for Rome—Well, what of this barbarian?"

"You will let him come with me aboard the Cabirra?" Varro demanded.

"Of course, since he is your friend. 'Tis lucky you passed when you did, else he'd have swung high as any of those rascals yonder," and the gray haired officer pointed to a quinquereme which rolled lazily halfway to the beleaguered city. From her main yard swayed and jolted a dozen black and contorted figures.

"Who are they?" Lycursus inquired carelessly.

"Roman deserters, most likely," Lucius replied. "Or mayhap pirates caught in the service of Epicydes."

Long before the Cabirra proceeded on her interrupted course the Roman fleet, worsted by the mighty engines of Archimedes, had drawn sullenly off, though the land attack was apparently being pressed with ever-increasing fury.

Once on the bireme again, Lycursus flung bearlike arms about the Celt and hugged him with boyish delight.

"By Zeus, I always swore you were too large to kill. Varro was sure the hook-noses had long since torn you limb from limb, but I said, 'Varro, that rascal's pulled through somehow, and we'll all get drunk together again some day!'"

"Celvenus! Now Artemis be praised!" Iskander and others of the Spartans now came running up and it warmed the wanderer's heart to see their joy at beholding him again.

Characteristically the ex-tribune, though he, perhaps more than any of the others, was devoted to the rescued Celt, paid his friend no attention until the Cabirra had found her place in the vast semicircle of ships Marcellus had arranged to blockade the trapped Carthaginian fleet.

By tens and twenties the Roman anchors went plunging down through water green-blue as Tiratha's eyes, but the Cabirra, detailed to the far left of line, was among the last to take position. Carefully, Varro picked a course through almost the whole of the entire battered Roman fleet, on which signs of elation were completely lacking; for though having accomplished its main purpose of beating back Epicydes's attempt to join the relieving fleet due to appear, Marcellus's squadron had dismally failed in its attack on the sea wall.

"Ten thousand curses," rumbled Varro, glaring at many-towered Syracuse. "This means a long and costly siege!"

In heading to her berth, the Cabirra swung around the stern of a huge quinquereme upon which some executions were taking place. Cealwyn, chancing to look at her, drew his breath in with a quick hissing sound that made Lycursus wheel about.

"What's amiss?"

"Look! I—I know him—" Cealwyn's fingers indicated one of those wretches who, firmly pinioned, was waiting to be swung off into eternity.

"Who is he?" the Greek demanded.

"Tothmes — an Egyptian pirate I met not long ago."

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"Well, he's only an Egyptian corpse now," grunted Iskander when an armored decurion sent the burly, copper-skinned figure tumbling from the quinquereme's bulwarks. The pirate fell perhaps six feet before the yellow rope about his neck tautened like a cracked whip and the yard above creaked loud under the Egyptian corsair's weight; gruesomely, half a dozen other bodies already suspended from it began jigging crazily.

Tothmes in Syracuse? Cealwyn plunged into a maze of conjecture. So Tothmes, having seized both Adherbal and Tiratha, and having murdered Verceterix, had hurried to Syracuse to claim ransom? Well, it had availed him little.

What of Valeria? He cherished a fierce hope that that galley he had last seen bearing down on the Vesta had been a Roman. That night he would make inquiry of the entire fleet, if need be.

WHEN the anchor splashed and the oars were drawn inboard, Varro stripped off his unornamented helmet with a weary curse.

"'Tis Pluto's own luck we could not have carried the sea wall."

"To Hades with the sea wall!" chuckled the Spartan captain who, with hot vinegar, had removed the last of sundry dark brown and red stains which had flecked his breastplate and greaves. "To Hades with Carthage and anything else that comes between me and my wine, right now. Mars and Bacchus are famous allies. Ho! Celvenus, are you become a Roman that you must mope when the fighting is done?"

And all the other Spartans were preparing to yield to the reaction from combat, but the Roman members of this curious ship's company sat stonily about mending their gear and in low tones commenting on the day's struggle.

Cealwyn, however, joined the grim browed ex-tribune in the shade of an awning and listened to the latter's description of how, in the Iddibal's harbor, he and Lycursus had waited until the last possible instant, of how they had been chased far out to sea by three Carthaginian quinqueremes, of how, picturing the rich loot of Syracuse, he had prevailed on Lycursus and other Spartans to offer ship and service to the proconsul. Then, briefly, he dwelt on the series of furious land assaults which Syracuse's Punic garrison had so easily beaten off.

"So you see, Rome's fortunes stand or fall upon the outcome of this siege," the ex-tribune repeated. "And I fear me—but enough of this. Tell me of your adventures."

When Cealwyn had complied, the ex-tribune was studying his bronzed companion with a fresh interest.

"I find it hard to believe," he murmured, "that you are that same Celvenus who picked up the elephant fork—"

"In some ways—"

"In body only—" insisted the man of Cannæ. "Your speech and gestures are different. Why, you no more resemble the dull barbarian I first knew than—than those feather-purposed Greeks resemble Romans!"

"You flatter me—" Cealwyn said with a sad smile. "I am still dull, I can neither win the girl I love, nor seize the gift of power and great wealth when 'tis nigh forced into my hands—"

Varro passed a hand over his deep-set eyes. "That you admit your failure shows how far your

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brains have developed. Nay, Celvenus, I believe now, as I have always believed, that in your skull lies the brain of a great general. The way you separate the essential from the unimportant, the way to have learned to act quickly after quick thinking. Nay, don't shake your head. I saw that on the night we escaped from Carthage—"

"I have learned but little." Abruptly Cealwyn changed his manner. "May I have some rowers? I—I would make certain inquiries concerning the girl, Valeria."

"Of course." Varro laid an affectionate hand on Cealwyn's shoulder. "Anything in the Cabirra is at your disposal."

SO, toward sundown, the Celt, half dreading the knowledge he sought, commenced a round of the Roman fleet. All inquiry proved vain until, near the end of his quest, a decurion in a trireme of the Vesta class, replied he had seen the tribune's ship afire and, after some reflection, recalled that a Punic quinquereme crew had boarded her.

"You are sure it was a Punic galley?" Cealwyn insisted in a queer, monotonous voice.

The decurion shook a bandaged head.

"No, I was too damned busy about my business, but I thought I saw a blue horse's head on her prow. That's all I know—"

"I thank you, decurion—so." Thoroughly weary and despairing the Celt had himself rowed to the Cabirra and scrambled heavily up to deck.

"Why so downcast?" hailed Lycursus, lying sprawled on a cloak and busily casting dice with two of his stalwart subordinates.

"Where is Varro?"

"Gone for a gloomy conference with the rest of the Roman captains. Here, drink this, 'twill warm your gullet and drive away that lost dog look on your face."

Without thinking, Cealwyn seized the proffered horn and, at a single draught, gulped down the spiced red wine as though it had been mead.

"By Bacchus!" roared the Greeks in high good humor. "Did you mark that? Give old Celvenus another!"

Heart-weary, bone-weary, Cealwyn accepted a second horn, and drained that as well.

"Now by the golden zone of Aphrodite!" bellowed Lycursus, "you've got a rare technique with a wine horn. Here"—he held out the dice—"come, lad, try a cast and shake off this infernal gloom. You are getting nigh as dreary as these sad-faced Romans.

"By all the gods, will you look at all those barn owls moping on the prow!" Lycursus jerked a broad contemptuous thumb to a group of legionnaires who, crouching about a fire on the foredeck, talked in low voices or lay sprawled beneath their watch cloaks and stared fixedly up into the star-studded sky.

"Aye, come drink and throw with us," Iskander urged with a vinous chuckle. "We may all be worm food to-morrow. Live while you may, O barbarian!"

Smiling, Cealwyn shook his head.

"Nay," he replied. "I've a mind to visit the camp below the city—I've yet to see a Roman legion encamped—"

"You'll more likely see the sharp end of a Roman spear if you haven't the password," Lycursus commented. "They're plagued strict—by Artemis! They make war a business, not an honorable pastime."

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Refreshed by the wine, Cealwyn crossed to the rail and there remained fixedly regarding the great city of Syracuse. How richly red was the glow of watch fires flaming on the towers, how fascinating the glow and sparkle of lights high up on the hills above the harbor! Somewhere over yonder, Valeria must be, unless she had perished in the flaming Vesta.

Valeria! His very soul cried out for her—Valeria! Valeria! Was she in danger? In pain? Suddenly he reached a decision and quietly slid down to the boat trailing beneath the Cabirra's stern and, casting it loose, began to row quietly off among the dim black hulls of the Roman fleet.

CHAPTER XXVII.

IN ENEMY HANDS.

THE iron shod spear butts of two Balearic mercenaries clanged loud on the stone floor, whereat the Captain of the Water Gate, a hatchet-faced Spaniard with features brown as a well tanned saddle, glanced up and frowned.

"Where did you catch this hang-dog rogue?"

"Below the water gate, O worthy Captain," announced the Balearian to Cealwyn's right and drew back lest water, dripping from his prisoner's sodden chiton, should wet his green and yellow kilt. "We heard him threshing about like a drowning cat, so Kulkas let down a rope to him."

Abruptly Cealwyn became suddenly conscious of the Gate Captain's pale brown eyes; they seemed almost feline in their keenness and innate cruelty. Forthwith, in the back of his brain an idea began germinating which fell in with his carefully evolved plan.

"Why drag this stinking offal into my quarters?" grunted the Spaniard. "'Tis Sosis who deals with spies. Away with him and have him crucified atop the sea wall to-morrow morning. We'll not be selfish, by Tanit, no! We'll let those stubborn Romans enjoy it, too!"

Hot, sweaty hands closed over Cealwyn's biceps, but he shook them off crying,

"Kill me and you kill yourself, O Captain of the Water Gate!"

"Heh?" The other, a Spaniard, spun about, bald head glinting in the lamplight. "What insolence is this? Nay, Kulkas—tell Sosis he'll favor me by having this impudent spy drawn and lest he be hungry after that, have his belly stuffed with salt."

Again the two Balearians commenced to tug at Cealwyn's arm but, resisting them furiously, he persisted in deep, ominous tones:

"Are you so eager to sign your own death warrant? Mabon! You look like an intelligent man!"

Face dark with fury, the mercenary captain leaped to his feet with a jingle of his chain armor. "Now may all the plagues of Egypt strike me if—" As though struck by a sudden thought, he checked himself and addressed the black browed guard called Kulkas, "Where was it you said you found this bold rascal?"

"Below the water gate, O worthy Mericus."

Deliberately seating himself once more, Mericus fell to tugging absently at the heavy gold ring dangling from his right ear lobe.

"And why will my life pay for your death?"

"Because," the prisoner replied, blue eyes and wet features very intent, "you are a mercenary in the employ

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of Carthage," and he smiled enigmatically, somewhat reassured at the Spaniard's penetrating regard.

"How came you to the water gate?" the Spaniard demanded, frowning at the oil lamp beside him which sputtered and gave off a faint odor of sandalwood.

"I was prisoner of Marcus Numa, a naval tribune of Rome, aboard the Vesta, trireme galley."

A penetrating silence fell in the Spanish Captain's stone walled quarters which were bare of furniture, save for a few chairs, a leather-covered couch and some racks for armor.

"The vessel was sunk?"

"Aye, burnt—"

Mericus slowly began to scratch his sparse black beard, then abandoned the operation to gather a scarlet watch cloak more tightly about him, for the chill of that rock hewn chamber, located as it was beneath the mighty citadel of Ortygia, bit to the very bone.

"Sunk, eh?" In apparent indecision, the Spaniard's pale eyes wandered from one burnished suit of armor to the next, and with a copper soled cothrun he commenced to irritably tap on the stone floor. At last he straightened on his chair and fixed the prisoner with those menacing yellow eyes of his.

"You may go," he directed the guards. "I will question the prisoner in private."

Thinking furiously, Cealwyn tried hard to foresee the correct course, and stood motionless while the two Balearians, after raising spears in salute, tramped heavily out.

DELIBERATELY Mericus unsheathed his sword and laid it on the table before him. "Draw near," he directed. "What is in your mind?"

"Much of value to you, O Mericus."

The other's lips drew back from irregular yellow teeth.

"So? Well, remember this: lie to me and I will have every bone in your body broken one by one. *Were* you a prisoner?"

Cealwyn was amazed to find how easily his mind ran, how clearly he foresaw the other's questions.

"No," he replied promptly, "though I am no Roman, I was yet not their prisoner."

Slowly the Spaniard's shaggy black eyebrows became joined and his ringed hands clasped themselves above the sword hilt.

"What are the Romans saying?"

"Despite their defeat yesterday, the Romans," Cealwyn replied promptly, "are determined, and will, sooner or later, storm Syracuse. For a fact I know that Marcellus has sworn, when he takes it, to leave alive not one of the mercenaries he finds inside the city."

"You lie! He'd never dare say such a thing!" Up sprang the Spaniard with the lamp throwing his shadow gigantic on the ceiling, and began stamping angrily back and forth.

Finally, Mericus's head, bald where long use of a helmet had rubbed away the hair, jerked around, narrow eyes suspiciously aglint.

"What was that Marcellus swore?"

Cealwyn repeated the statement and added: "You can be sure that the proconsul will not abandon this siege until Syracuse is won."

"Bah!" The fox-featured Spaniard raised an impatient hand. "Talk! Talk! Though that old vulture waits twenty years he'll never take Syracuse, unless—" The speaker paused, his predatory eyes became very penetrating.

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"Unless," supplemented the shivering prisoner, "he finds a friend within its walls."

"Silence! Would you dare to question my loyalty? By Moloch! I'll have your insolent tongue ripped out for this!"

Cealwyn deemed it better to say nothing. Was there a false ring to that indignation?

Scowling at the lamp before him, the Captain of the Water Gate continued: "But the truth is—we mercenaries are between Scylla and Charybdis. Besides," he added, "I have small cause to love Epicydes, that Punic fool who thinks, because he is one of Hannibal's whelps, he can tell us old soldiers of Syracuse when to blow our precious noses.

"Well, he can't. We mercenaries fight Carthage's battles, die by the thousands for her and what do we get? Empty promises and leather tokens, such as Matho and Spendius got, or the dog's death such as they gave to Xanthippus, who saved them from the legions of Regulus. We get naught but scorn and contempt from these sweet-scented, do-nothings they send out from Carthage.

"Why, mark you," Mericus halted to finger his lavishly jewelled sword hilt so that it cast back the lamplight with a hundred brilliant flashes, "this very evening one of their high-and-mighty noblewomen called me a 'presumptuous barbarian jackal' because I invited her to dine here in the citadel!"

Cealwyn, well pleased with the other's words, still made no comment.

"NOW, on the other hand, that old he-wolf Marcellus, swears to exterminate us like so many rats—"

"Unless" — Cealwyn's blue eyes caught and held those of the Spaniard —"the noble proconsul had cause to be—"

"To be?"

"Er—grateful."

The mercenary captain's foul breath fanned Cealwyn's face as he whispered: "You are sure of this?"

With a calmness that was most convincing, the prisoner declared that the hard pressed proconsul would promise much to bring the siege to a swift and successful end. "'Tis a vital matter. A victory would bolster the morale of Rome and her wavering allies," Cealwyn added.

"So?" The Spaniard's black eyes bored like gimlets into his prisoner's pallid features. "Well, it's too risky—I'd be safer having you hanged at once."

To Mericus's amazement the shivering prisoner nodded. "Aye, for the moment—but what of the day when Marcellus's veterans pour over your walls? And they will some day. These Romans dare not admit defeat—"

"You're a glib rascal," Mericus remarked—"so glib I fear to trust you. However, what is there for me in such a risk?"

"The proconsul will not be ungrateful."

The bald captain uttered a contemptuous, snorting laugh. "Such risks call for more than gratitude; I want Roman citizenship, fifty thousand golden denarii and safe conduct for certain men I shall name."

"What of the other mercenaries?"

Mericus shrugged. "Am I their keeper? In times like these, it's every man for himself. Now listen carefully, if these terms are acceptable, tomorrow morning let the three galleys nearest the water gate display a red, a blue and a white flag in that order."

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"It shall be done—" The Celt found it hard to speak. So he had guessed right—

Meanwhile, the Spaniard swung across his quarters to lift from its peg a crestless helmet; then selected another which he gave to Cealwyn, together with a thick blue cloak. "Come," said he briskly, "I will show you a point in the Tyche quarter where the wall is low. Customarily it is carefully guarded, but on the feast of Diana, tomorrow night, I will contrive to have it guarded by the proper sentries. What is it?"

"A moment—" Cealwyn had held out a detaining hand. "Before we go further I must know one thing."

Readily suspicious, the Spaniard drew back. "What is it?"

"Among prisoners to-day taken from the Roman ships—was there a woman?"

Mericus uttered a surprised laugh. "By Moloch of the bull's head, it is queer you should know of it—"

"She was golden haired?"

"Aye—"

"Brown eyed?"

"I did not notice—"

"Was she straight backed and of medium height?"

"Aye."

Anxiety indescribable was in Cealwyn's voice as he cried out, "She—she is safe?"

"As near as I know," the Spaniard returned carelessly. "She'll probably be offered for sale some two days hence—ought to bring a good price, too, provided her beauty hasn't been marred."

Cealwyn gripped the other's arm so tightly that Mericus winced and drew back amazed at the other's earnestness.

"Listen," he uttered, in a fierce undertone, "if you would have me save your life and make your fortune, order that girl—she is Valeria Porsena—brought to the citadel and there keep her safe until the city is in Roman hands."

MERICUS stared a little, then his thin brown lips formed a mocking smile. "I see. But it may cause some trouble—"

"I'll pay you well for it," Cealwyn broke in.

"Well then, it shall be done if possible. Now mark you, I'll have your lady quartered with my concubines in the third tower from the water gate. You will charge Marcellus to leave that tower unstormed?"

"As I would my own house," promised the Celt grimly. "And now are we off?"

"No." While the Spaniard buckled on his sword of that famous Iberian steel which even Roman armorers could not reproduce, he went on, "Remember these points—your success depends upon it. First, the Hexapylon gate must be seized. 'Tis the axis of the inner fortifications. With that in your hands, the Tyche, Epipolæ and the Neapolis quarters must fall. Next, let the army below the city attack the Necropolis Gate and I, meanwhile, will open the water gate."

"Aye, but how are these attacks to be made together? A simultaneous assault would leave no doubt of the outcome."

Mericus considered a moment, then shrugged. "I cannot see how such a matter—valuable as it would be—can be arranged. No trumpet could carry so far—no flags can be seen at night—"

"But," Cealwyn interrupted, "fire can be. Is there no high place where a few men might show a flare?"

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"No—well—perhaps. Ha!" The Spaniard's sallow features lit. "I have it—a flare shown atop the Treasurer's Palace might be seen from all sides— But 'tis plagued risky."

"To Hades with the risks—I'll run them!" Tanarus! So Valeria was a prisoner in Syracuse! But all too well he knew what sale into concubinage or shameful slavery would mean. He must hurry!

"It might be done," Mericus admitted presently. "Yes, especially tomorrow night; 'tis then we celebrate the Great Festival of Diana, guardian of the city—Moloch!" the Spaniard's vulpine features broke into a grin—"there's rare irony in that! Well, at any rate, I will show you the Treasurer's Palace and you will see what I mean.

"Here, pull on these sandals and take that sword. No one will dare halt or question me, but you had better look like one of my men."

During their progress along the massive ramparts between one tower to the next they met alert sentinels representing almost every nation of the world, but all passed the Spaniard and his silent companion.

It was an unforgettable hour that ensued during which the Celt asked numberless questions and Mericus, often halting on the worn stone parapet, would point out various strategic points of this vast city. Everywhere, the eye encountered stately porticoed villas, richly carved marble houses, huge peristyles composed of towering columns that were reminiscent of tree trunks. Dominating all these structures soared the hundred foot walls, so strategetically perfect that they had never been stormed.

"Yonder," the Spaniard said, pointing to a many columned edifice looming up above a dark tangle of fig and olive trees, "is the Palace of the Treasurer. Do you see how it towers above all the city, saving only Fort Euryalus? That is where the signal must be given. When we reach the Hexapylon gate I will present you to one Sosis—a Syracusan who, for good reason, hates and fears the city's Carthaginian overlords."

Gradually, last details of the plot were arranged in a further conference with the Syracusan general and, feverishly, Cealwyn struggled to memorize his data.

Half an hour later his head was buzzing like a hive of bees when, with Mericus's connivance, he lowered himself to the foot of the sea wall and struck quietly for the riding lights of the Roman fleet.

BEHIND an oaken table that was without ornament, Marcus Claudius Marcellus, grizzled proconsul of the Roman Republic, laced powerful fingers together and then commenced to issue crisp instructions to the scribes seated at his right and left.

Each of these made his stylus fly over the yellow-red waxen tablets, for the grim old man talked quickly in clipped, high-pitched accents.

Standing before him in this severely plain cabin, and conversing in low monosyllables, stood men whose names were familiar to half the Western world.

Yonder Titus Crispinus, the heavy bodied and bull necked proprætor and commander of the army below Syracuse, was in conversation with the lean and bony Otacilius, sub-admiral of the fleet. Besides these, perhaps a dozen other tribunes and senators stood beneath the bronze cabin lamps.

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All fell silent when the proconsul deliberately threw back his scarlet-edged white war cloak and got to his feet. So tall was this stern old man that his bald head nearly touched the deck beams above.

"So, then, it is understood; the attack will commence to-morrow night the instant that fire is seen on the Palace of the Treasurer."

Raising their hands in salute, scribes and weary staff officers tramped out.

"Bring in the barbarian," Marcellus directed. "I would have words with him."

A moment fierce old man and stalwart Celt stood gazing at each other. Then the Roman said, "You have plotted well — your ruse and your foresight, general, are remarkable. Now pray state what you wish as reward."

But the Celt shook his head. "Nay, most noble proconsul, when the city is yours that is time enough."

"*Perpol!* A barbarian disdainful of gold?" the proconsul ejaculated and looked with fresh interest at the man before him. "Indeed, my friend, you are a strange Northern. First, you reason that the mercenaries in the city *must* be corruptible, then—ah well." From his finger Marcellus pulled a heavy gold ring. "Take this—it will be your authority to-morrow night—you see?"

A tight smile creased the old man's lips—"I trust you, though the gods alone know why."

"One request—O most noble proconsul."

"Name it."

"When I enter the city to-morrow, I must have with me ten true men—"

"That has been arranged—and now friend Celvenus, time presses—"

"The request is," Cealwyn insisted, "that two trusted friends of mine—"

Marcellus picked up a papyrus scroll. "Take whomsoever you wish."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A TRAP?

VALERIA! Anxiety concerning her gnawed ever more persistently in his brain. In a siege things might so very easily go wrong. Then Cealwyn deliberately put further conjecture aside, for the boat, bearing Varro, Lycursus and the eight Romans who were to accompany him, was pulling steadily between the anchored galleys.

Luck seemed to favor the enterprise, for the sea was almost glassy smooth when they rounded Cape Panagia and pulled for the Bay of Thapsus, where, before long, the boat's keel grated on the sands of a cove overshadowed by the ramparts of the Tyche quarter.

These in turn were reared on the summit of a high bluff. Save for the stars, it was quite dark, and Cealwyn, glancing up at the walls, was even able to see a glow of light reflected from the city beyond.

Suddenly he started and whipped out his sword. A man in armor had risen from a clump of laurel and was striding down to him. It proved to be a Roman who, when he saw Marcellus's ring, saluted and whispered that the storming force was in readiness.

Utterly amazed was the Celt to discover that all about him lay a silent multitude so skillfully concealed amid trees, bushes and the long sea grass, that only the sharpest of eyes could have caught an indistinct outline here and there.

"Marvelous," whispered Lycursus. "Never have I seen a better ambush."

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With his ten men equipped in the miscellaneous armor of mercenaries, Cealwyn set off up that goat path which Mericus had pointed out the night before, and soon felt long, dewy grass blades licking at his bare knees like so many tiny, cold tongues.

Almost before he realized it, they had arrived at the base of the wall, and there pressed themselves flat to its cold rough surface.

Where was that knotted rope which Sosis had promised to leave a-dangle over this sheer barrier? Carefully, Cealwyn studied the mighty flanking towers which, to the right and left, soared black into starry skies.

"The rope," murmured Varro anxiously. "Has that accursed Sosis betrayed you?"

"Wait here—I'll look farther to the right." Promptly the party flung themselves flat, and, pulling dark cloaks up over them, became indistinct, almost invisible objects.

Shaken, Cealwyn commenced to stride along a path at the base of the wall, then halted to listen; but could hear nothing save the soft hissing of the sea some hundred feet below.

Where was that rope? He strained his eyes upward, then shrank flat to the wall.

Far above him had shone the brief shimmer of starlight on a steel headpiece. He braced himself for the blare of an alarm trumpet, but instead a rope came swaying and curling downwards to prove that Sosis and Mericus had apparently kept their words.

But hardly had he seized the rope end than on the wall there broke out a scuffle in which feet stamped furiously and the shivering clang of steel on steel rang loud.

"We are betrayed," growled Lycursus. "Now, by Artemis, I—" He fell silent and pressed himself flat to the wall, for, grotesquely outlined against the stars, appeared the black outline of a man with arms wildly clawing at the empty air. He hurtled earthwards, struck the inclined slope below the path, and so bounced off down the slope to where the ambushed Romans must be anxiously clutching their spears.

"We are betrayed," panted Varro. "We must go back—"

IN the dread suspense Cealwyn hesitated, then a second figure, this time limp and leaden, momentarily blotted out the glowing stars, and, like the first victim, struck with sickening violence to roll off down the laurel-shrouded hillside.

What had happened? Had the traitors been caught at their work? Or had Mericus and Sosis just slain a pair of loyal sentinels? Too bad the corpses had rolled below; there was no telling anything from the ominous silence now reigning on the battlements.

"Wait here."

"Nay, let me go—" Varro pleaded.

"Orders!" Cealwyn snapped and, thinking of that night on the Byrsa, smiled grimly. Queer that to-night *he* was giving the commands! Gently Cealwyn eased his short, stabbing sword from its sheath and clamped his teeth on its cold, slightly oily blade before seizing that enigmatic rope.

Carefully the Celt braced his feet against the rough surface of the stone and then went up hand over hand. What fate awaited him on the summit? He wondered when his breath began to come in whistling gasps and light reflected on the crenellations above from the city grew even brighter.

Up, up. Sweat poured down inside the Greek breastplate he wore and his

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arms felt as though they were motivated by sinews far too short for them. And now his heart commenced to drum like the hoofs of a chariot team for the summit was not a yard above him. He paused a moment, listening intently, but heard nothing save the braying of distant festival horns and the clatter of tambourines.

He set his muscles, then suddenly swung one leg over the cold, rough stonework and hauled himself astride the parapet. Almost with the same motion he whipped the sword from his mouth for yonder lay sprawled the corpse of a dark-browed soldier whose wide and vacant eyes stared fixedly at the sky. A helmet, twisted grotesquely sidewise on his head, lay with its plume almost touching his sandaled foot. Cealwyn was still eying the body when, from behind a spear locker, materialized a figure clad in a sable cloak. Sword in hand, Cealwyn flung himself forward, but the other whipped off a crestless helmet to reveal the square and brutal features of the Syracusan traitor called Sosis.

"Bid your men come up quickly," the Syracusan whispered in shaken tones. "I fear we are discovered. A few minutes ago two Carthaginian officers appeared—I killed them, but—"

Cealwyn nodded and, on leaning out over the battlement, was surprised to find that two of his party were already on their way up.

"Bid them hurry, hurry!" the traitor instructed anxiously. "We'll go on as soon as your ten men are up here. When we're well clear, your legionnaires below can take this section of wall from flanking tower to flanking tower unobserved. They understand that they are not to open the general attack until they see a flare on the palace of the treasurer?"

"Yes," Cealwyn replied, "not a man will move from this section of wall until the Hexapylon Gate is ours."

One last look Cealwyn cast into the darkness below and his heart leapt to see long lines of armored men bearing jointed sections of ladder which, like a magic river streaming uphill, toiled to the foot of the eighty foot battlement.

SCARCELY had Varro, last of the Celt's party, gained the wall than the Syracusan traitor led off with a haste which aroused deep misgivings. Mabon! but that rogue had an evil face. Still, there was nothing to do but to follow him down a battered flight of stairs which shone all bluish in the light of a moon now rising above the sea.

"Column of two," Sosis directed. "And if any one challenges, let the Spartan answer that you are special guards."

However, Cealwyn and his followers presented such a convincing counterfeit of what they purported to be, that the trip through the crowded and boisterous streets of the city was without event.

Apparently the festival was at its height, for from every direction half naked citizens of both sexes came reeling out of doorways, holding out flagons and belching loud toasts to Diana. But that grim detail of twelve only pushed them aside and with sheathed swords beat off the ribby curs which were forever snapping at their heels.

"Hail, Diana! Hail to the Huntress! Hail to Diana, Saviour of the City!"

The smell of wine, incense and hot humanity grew stronger still in the warm night air when, at last, the forbidding mass of the Hexapylon Gate loomed above the surrounding structures. Located, as it was, well within

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the city's outwalls, the guards about it seemed few and interested in nothing other than revelers.

"How beaut'ful — le's go an' drink—" Sosis, pretending to be more than a little drunk, flung a sweaty arm about Cealwyn's neck and patted the Celt's vermilion painted breast plates as he whispered, "There are less than six guards on duty. The others who should be here are away drinking. The next relief," his right eye winked elaborately, "is drugged and will sleep till their Manes hail Charon's boat.

"I must stay here," he continued, with his foul breath fanning Cealwyn's face—"to show your men how to jam the gate valves. Take four and go swiftly to the Palace of the Treasurer. You have but to follow this same wall and use the pass word 'Damippus' to take you into the palace grounds."

Two painted drabs staggered up, vigorously thumping tambourines and yelled obscene suggestions at the grave-featured detail. Varro contemptuously flung one of the unfortunate creatures aside, but Lycursus chucked the other under the chin and shook his head. "Nay—later, chick. Be here at midnight, when I come off duty—"

When the drabs had reeled on again Sosis continued: "A slave in my pay has carried some reed mats to the topmost terrace of the palace and a lamp will stand ready beside them."

While more revelers jostled the traitor, Sosis went on with a calmness that was in strange contrast to his previous agitation.

"So you have only to climb a long stair from the garden to the housetop, then set the matting afire."

Cealwyn, with anxious sweat trickling down his neck in cold little rivulets, nodded grimly, then, motioning to Varro, Lycursus and a man called Cinna, forced his way through the crowd to a flight of stone stairs leading up to one of those time-worn inner walls which divided this pleasure-loving city into its six parts.

APPARENTLY Sosis intended to play fair for the word "Damippus" brought Cealwyn and his three companions quite unhindered to the gardens of the Treasurer's Palace.

Gradually more and more moon-silvered roofs glimmered and, like a gigantic spiderweb, the inner wall system could be seen in its entirety. Yes, and yonder, rising from a grove of carefully clipped cedars, appeared the white outline of those marble stairs which Sosis had said would lead to the roof of this sumptuous edifice.

Pulling war cloaks closer about them lest the moon draw some betraying gleam on their armor, the four dodged from one bush clump to another until they set foot to the stair and, proceeding very warily, commenced to climb, aware that loud and drunken voices sounded from the lighted lawn terraces below them.

The breathless four had one bad moment; a white peacock which had been drowsing on a marble balustrade suddenly uttered a harsh scream and, spreading lacy wings, circled down to the dark, wind-stirred pines in the garden. Voices broke out in comment as the four adventurers raced up the last steps to find themselves standing on a roofless platform of marble.

Their armor blued by the symbol of Syracuse's patron goddess, the four wide-eyed adventurers promptly crouched low behind the marble railing and wiped sweat from their helmet linings.

"But the mats!" Varro whispered

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hoarsely. "Celvenus—where are the mats Sosis spoke of?"

"They must be here somewhere," Cealwyn flung back, but his heart seemed squeezed by the chill hand of a dead man. *The unfurnished platform was destitute of mats, and there was no lamp!*

"That cursed Syracusan has betrayed us," Lycursus snarled, powerful features becoming terrible in their wrath. "Let us go back and slay him, then warn the others ere they fall into the trap."

But Cealwyn held the Spartan's shoulder piece. "Stop," he hissed and pointed to the floor of polished basalt. "See that shred of grass? The mats were here once! Perhaps some steward, chancing to see them, has but recently ordered them below."

Varro, his eyes glittering beneath the visor of his Theban helmet, nodded. "Aye—and the Tyche wall is already in our hands—"

"Perhaps—" Cealwyn's brain seemed to seethe, like a curiously boiling kettle. *All this was a surpassingly clever snare for the Roman Army.* Dare he give that signal which might lure thousands of Romans to their death? Dare he withhold that sign which might give them that victory Rome needed so desperately? It was those shreds of broken matting which decided him and, with his crest asway in the moonlight he whirled, pointing towards a stair up which beat a feeble ray of lamplight.

"Get below! Find anything that will burn."

As if to mock the Celt's desperation, there broke out from the depths of the palace raucous shouts of laughter which bespoke the presence of many feasters. And then, as if to irrevocably seal the fate of the adventurers, guests commenced to wander out into the hitherto deserted gardens, and so cut off all hope of an undetected retreat.

CHAPTER XXIX.

SORCERER'S DEN.

THE swords of the four made a sibilant *zwe-e-ep* before they went leaping down a narrow stair leading from the palace's summit into the strangely furnished apartment they found below. It was tenanted only by a terrified black slave who quickly perished under Cinna's sword blade before he was aware of this sudden invasion.

"'Tis some sorcerer's den," Lycursus cried, recoiling from a maze of intricate models of wood which stood amid an array of weird glass instruments.

But Cealwyn only flung a quivering hand towards a table heaped with a confusion of parchment and papyrus rolls, all inscribed with curious lines in red and black. Occupying the center of the floor of this queer laboratory was a large frame filled with damp sand in which more geometric signs had been sketched.

Lycursus, red plumes waving, caught up a great armful of papyrus manuscripts, while Varro seized a reed floor mat of that type which had been intended to form the beacon. Cinna stood, with slowly dripping sword held ready, at a red and black painted door connecting with the palace's interior.

"Ha! This will serve." Cealwyn whipped off his helmet and with it masked a small oil lamp which stood burning dimly amid that maze of curious models and contrivances. "And now back aloft!"

Squarely in the center of the basalt

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terrace Lycursus dropped his double armful of dry, rustling manuscripts, then turned to help Varro rip the grass rug in shreds.

"Quick! Quick!" panted Varro, gaunt face working queerly in the moonlight. "Let Cannæ be avenged!"

Sweating features yellowly revealed, Cealwyn stooped, whipped the lamp from under his helmet and thrust it among the papyrus rolls at the bottom of the heap of inflammables. Every nerve in his body hummed like touched harp strings when, like a red lance flung into the sky, a tongue of flame soared upwards.

Was the flame brilliant enough? He was reassured when, an instant later, the whole platform was revealed to the last detail by a fierce, throbbing glare. Now from the semi-darkness below broke out an amazed cry of "Fire! Fire!"

Like devils toiling about the Pit, Celt, Greek and Roman fed roll after roll of manuscript into the flames until, above the crackle of their signal fire, could be heard indistinct undertones like the uneasy sighing of a forest which prepares for a lashing by the elements.

Like the rush of a rising gale now arose from the north a terrible, deep-throated Roman cheer; from the southeast the wailing war trumpets of the fleet screamed like the voices of the Furies themselves; and to the south a battering ram commenced to thud against the Necropolis Gate.

HIGHER, ever higher, soared the flames until the top of the Treasurer's Palace shone like the Pharos above the naval harbor at Carthage. Overwhelmed by a surge of undefinable emotions, Cealwyn could for the moment only stare across the fire at Lycursus. Powerful, sheathed in perfectly fitting armor which in the fire light gleamed blood red, the Spartan captain seemed a very incarnation of the dread war god himself when he exultantly brandished his short two-edged sword and yelled defiance at the amazed Carthaginians below.

"Hail to Artemis Orthia!" he cried, then, with the fire light sparkling in his short yellow beard, added, "Now follow the sweetest moments of life—"

"Nay," contradicted Varro, sadly picking up a fragment of charred papyrus, "this night marks the end of a great city and a noble civilization; just as this flame destroys the patient work of some mathematician. But, since it must be Syracuse or Rome, why then—" His sword flashed on high as he shouted at the top of his lungs, *"Ave Roma!"*

Deliberately, the Celt locked his helmet cheek pieces tight beneath his chin, and then, in order to decide on a course of action, stared over the parapet into the moonlit darkness.

The first distinct sound he could recognize was from the Hexapylon Gate. Yonder could be heard the harsh clash of arms, followed by the piercing shriek of a stricken man. And now the first Carthaginian alarm trumpets commenced to blow frantically. Others far and near took up the breathless call to arms, summoning hurried detachments of soldiery which appeared buckling on equipment as they ran.

Too late! Like a deadly glittering tide, the Roman legions were pouring over the Tyche Wall and their fierce shout of *"Pro Roma!"* made the warm night air resound.

In the garden below, women guests raised a terrified wail and their escorts milled uncertainly about, calling out to know what had happened.

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Almost as quickly as they had sprung into being, the signal flames sank into nothingness. Sobered by the chill gloom, Cealwyn abruptly realized he and the others were alone in the very heart of Syracuse.

"Below! Below!" Lycursus urged, tugging at Varro's sleeve. "We can get our pick of the loot—jewels for me, none of your heavy gold!"

"Nay!" Cealwyn snapped. "We will stay here in the palace. From this hill we can see what happens and, mayhap, better direct some of our detachments."

"Well spoken." Varro's hard hand closed over Cealwyn's. "By all the gods of Olympus, how well you have learned to use that handsome head of yours!"

His armor illumined from below, Cinna now appeared on the stair leading into the palace. "They're coming," he called, and lifted his round, nail-studded Theban shield to deflect the javelin which presently lodged quivering in its wooden face. In an instant the other three were at his side and savagely beating off the attack of a dozen Punic nobles who, half-armed, but warmed with wine and their own genuine courage, came charging upwards.

IN a united, furious charge, the four slashed at their unarmored opponents with such savage vigor that the mob of attackers gave way and fled, leaving some six of their number to dye a brighter hue the polished cedar floor of the laboratory.

"At them! At them!" Cealwyn was shouting.

"Drive them below."

Promptly Varro took up the cry, for he knew that in this, like most Punic and Syracusan homes, the private and sleeping apartments were set off, by an elaborate door of brass grillework, from the public rooms and the servants' quarters. In short order the last Carthaginian was driven through it and Varro shot a series of bolts which offered at least a temporary barrier against any return of the bewildered masters of the palace.

A while ago Cealwyn had guessed that the Treasurer's Palace must be occupied by persons of extraordinary importance and, despite the furious conflict now raging throughout the Tyche and Epipolæ quarters, a detachment of Syracusan guards appeared in the street below and, on being admitted, at once charged into that structure which had given the alarm.

"Nearly a hundred of them. Lucky they haven't thought of the stair from the garden," remarked Cinna, as he drew back from the window.

"We had better search this wing," Varro advised, "lest there be enemies hidden in here with us. Yonder grille," he nodded to the marvelously designed portal of brass, "is handsome, but 'twill be easy for these Carthaginian dogs to break down."

Without further delay the four commenced to range from one glittering apartment to the next, and found them all empty until Lycursus flung back the door of a chamber, walled in yellow marble. This proved to be a second laboratory filled with countless and intricate devices similar to those above, and there in a cerule chair in the center of the room sat an old man with beard and hair so white as to seem fashioned of cotton.

Fingers locked beneath his chin, he slouched, apparently lost in thought, with eyes studying the series of angles and tangents drawn in the damp, gray surface of a sand box.

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From across the room Lycursus raised a panting hail, "Answer, old man! Are—other doors—this wing besides—brass one?"

Still muttering to himself in Greek, the seated figure stirred not at all and remained apparently oblivious to the torrent of resounding blows which already rained at that frail bronze door.

"Answer!" Bloodied sword held ready, the Spartan leaped across the glassy floor of yellow marble.

LOUDER grew the din of the Carthaginians. Cealwyn, then Varro, now arrived and peered open-mouthed into the laboratory.

"By the gods!" the latter gasped. "This must be the famous Archimedes himself."

A menacing figure in bronze, Lycursus now was towering over the pensive old man.

"Answer!" he roared above the rattle of blows on the grille. "Answer me! Is there another door?"

The Spartan bent low to catch an answer and thus the tip of his sword sheath struck the sand.

"Do not disturb my circles," was all that Archimedes said.

Though Varro cried out, "Spare him! Spare him! 'Tis Marcellus's orders," the Spartan uttered a harsh laugh.

"Circles? Nay, old dotard, I'll not disturb your circles, but I'll disturb that stubborn head of yours."

Like a sunbeam cast off a mirror, the mercenary's heavy sword flashed downwards and Varro uttered a horrified cry when the glittering steel sank deep into the great mathematician's head. Without a sound and with scarcely a struggle, the murdered genius slumped forward, his limp and bony right hand irrevocably disturbing those calculations which his massive brain alone could understand.

"Marcellus will have your head for this!" Varro burst out; but the Spartan only laughed and whirled about on hearing the shattered doors clang apart.

"Scatter!" Cealwyn cried when, far down a colonnaded corridor, appeared a column of furious Syracusan and Punic soldiery.

Without hesitating, Cealwyn dove through a gorgeous red and gold hanging to the right, and began to run down a very long hallway that was lined with many statues. His cothurns banging loudly on the tile floor, the Celt feverishly sought some haven which might shelter him until the Romans arrived.

Ha! Yonder was a solid looking door of cedar reinforced with iron bands. In full stride he flung himself around the edge of the door, put his shoulder to it, and as quietly as possible slid its heavy bolts into place. A near thing! Gasping for breath, he spun about and found, to his joy, that this was a corner room; there was no other door; two windows grilled with graceful copper designs were the only other openings in its blue painted walls.

At the far end of this high ceilinged apartment a lamp burned upon a table and wrought lovely tints upon a magnificent amphora of iridescent glass. Suddenly the intruder gave a startled gasp, for standing beside the table and even more graceful than the amphora, was a tall figure clothed in a gorgeous tunic of amber colored silk that was edged with a rich yellow velvet.

As though stunned, the Celt swayed where he stood and the blood dimmed sword in his right hand wavered uncertainly downwards, for there, gaz-

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ing upon him with an expression of utter amazement, stood Tiratha, of the house of Iddibal.

CHAPTER XXX.

A WOMAN SPURNED.

"CELVENUS!" From beneath the jeweled fillet of emeralds securing her hair, Tiratha looked at him and her bright lips began to quiver violently.

"Come closer," she murmured, studying him from black horsehair crest to clumsy cothurns. "Come closer. Are you indeed alive—? Or—or are you the shade of that Celvenus I love?"

Overwhelmed in a surging tide of emotions, Cealwyn made no response. How indescribably beautiful she was, how very like some dark and mysterious jewel.

"I—I thought you dead," she cried in a strangled undertone.

"Evidently," he spoke at last in a lifeless monotone. "You lost no time in deserting me when the Egyptian—"

He fell silent at the stricken look which now dominated her suddenly pallid features.

Then she hurried up to gaze intently into his ruddy, sweat-streaked features.

"Nay, by the Sacred Veil of Tanit, I tried my best to kill Tothmes. When I turned and ran it was to seize that first javelin which missed you; but he caught me and dragged me back to the galley where his villains were murdering your friend the Gaul.

"Oh, my Celvenus!" Her cool small hands passionately encircled his arm and she lifted a face, radiant with joy. "Celvenus, in what hells have I not dwelt since I thought you dead! Ah, my adored one, smile on me a little!"

When he remained silent she continued to misunderstand his restraint.

"On the honor of the Iddibals I swear I did not desert you. Gladly would I have died at your side, but that accursed Egyptian was too strong—two weeks back he surrendered Adherbal and me to ransom, here in Syracuse."

"Ah, Tiratha." A vast wretchedness seized the Celt. "How can I—if you but knew."

With a joyful cry she flung slender, jewel-decked arms about his neck and raised a soft, eager mouth. "I cannot! All I know is that you have risked everything to come to me—to seek me out."

He stared at her in amazement. "But you do not understand. Listen!"

In through the grilled windows beat the clash of arms and the distant yells of combatants locked in a final struggle. Carelessly, she waved a small hand.

"A drunken riot," she laughed. "All Syracuse is drunk to-night—I had planned to attend the Lord Treasurer's feast but, at the last moment, I had no heart. Ever haunting me was that memory of you lying there on the blowing sand— Ah, Tanit be praised that that nightmare is past!"

Closer she pressed her soft and fragrant body to the vermilion painted breast plate.

"O my Celvenus, I have such plans for you. The Romans *must* lose, cannot you understand? Syracuse is provisioned for a year, and before that time our great Hannibal—"

SLOWLY he loosed her embrace to hold her at arm's length, but his blue eyes were very gentle as he said,

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"O noble Suffeta, even yet you do not understand.—It—it was not you I came to seek in Syracuse."

The lovely olive features paled a little, then stiffened in incredulity.

"Not I?"

"Nay."

"Not I?" she repeated breathlessly and fell back a step, great blue-green eyes ablaze—all her softness gone. "Ha, I have it! 'Tis that plagued serving wench you love! How history repeats itself!"

Her eyes shone like angry emeralds and her small body seemed to contract like that of a leopard about to strike.

"Well, by the horns of Moloch, you shall not have her! You cannot have her! Do you understand?"

"That is possible," Cealwyn said stonily, "but I shall want no one else."

The pain stamped on her features struck Cealwyn to the heart. Tiratha now stood with lips compressed, her right hand furiously revolving a huge emerald ring on the left.

"You will not want her," she choked.

It seemed hardly his own voice that put the single word, "Why?"

"Because," Tiratha spoke with a grim satisfaction that was dreadful to the silent listener, "like any other runaway slave, the wench Valeria has been branded! Aye, on forehead and both cheeks, and 'twas this very morning your lovely woman's tongue was cast to the dogs of the street."

"You lie!" Terrible in his fury, the Celt raised his sword.

"Do I? Nay, you *know* I do not. Last night Adherbal spied her among some prisoners—the Roman vixen!"

Valeria mutilated, made dumb! The whole palace seemed to rock beneath his feet.

Taking advantage of his stunned silence, Tiratha stepped close once more. "You have wit, Celvenus—at least I used to think so—and—and once you did not find me wholly unattractive." Her voice (in his numbed ears) was now that of one who was desperately pleading for more than life.

"Be not a fool, Celvenus! Would you rather look upon a mangled hag for life than enjoy beauty, riches and power with me?"

So violent was her emotion that her words seemed to be flung out by some explosive force; but the Celt's helmeted head slowly sagged forward until his chin pressed the cold bronze of his cuirass.

"Answer me," she pleaded. "Am I not right?"

"Valeria," he muttered. "My poor, poor Valeria. What woe I have brought on you!"

As though stung by a steel barb, the Suffeta recoiled. "Swine of a barbarian! Ass! Clod of a savage!" She broke off when outside sounded the noise of heavily running feet—the pursuers at last. Now harsh Punic voices yelled on the far side of the door.

"Ha, so they have tracked you down?" Quivering in every fibre, Tiratha threw back her jeweled head. "Ho! Outside there, to me, the Suffeta! Help! Help!"

Then as an armored body crashed against the door she commenced to curse the motionless Celt with the most fearful imprecations. Down upon his head, she called the wrath of every evil god known to the Western world.

CEALWYN looked in her furious, sea-green eyes. Because the beating on the door had suddenly ceased, her voice filled the whole lamplit room.

"May all the demons of the sea, the

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sky and the air harass and—" Suddenly, Tiratha faltered and though her lips moved, no sound came forth; then, in a series of little jerks, her arms sank and suddenly she flung herself down to clasp his bare knees just above the tops of his greaves. "O Celvenus, my beloved, forgive me! Not a word of that did I mean! But I love you, love you so! Take me as your handmaiden, aye, even as your concubine, if there is no other way. Without you—"

Gently, Cealwyn raised her to her feet.

"You are distraught, Suffeta, and I am glad you have revoked the curses, but now—"

A new trample of feet sounded in the hall and the fierce cry of "*Pro Roma!*" made its ceiling ring. Wide apart flew the oblique eyes of the daughter of the Iddibals.

"*Pro Roma!*" she faltered. "What—what is this I hear?"

"It is the voice of the Romans," Cealwyn replied quietly. "The city has fallen into their hands."

"Then—it—it was not a riot I heard?"

"Nay," Cealwyn replied and was amazed to find so little sense of triumph. "It was I who, to keep an oath I made in Carthage, led the Roman legions over the wall of Tyche."

"What oath?"

"That, to avenge a sister ravaged by Adherbal and his men, I would see the rich and mighty of the Punic race lie trembling at my feet." While the noise of combat grew louder he passed a quivering hand over his eyes—"But that must have been another Celvenus; my goal won, I find there is naught but unhappiness for all of us—you, myself—and my Valeria—"

"Open, open!" When deafening torrents of lance butts fell against the panels, Tiratha straightened and turned away.

"Have no fear," Cealwyn called. "Your life is safe."

He turned and in harsh Latin shouted out who he was, but the frenzied attackers only hammered more furiously and presently a statue used as a ram shattered the wood work until the door tottered on its hinges and fell, disclosing a group of wild-eyed, blood splashed legionnaires who clutched gleaming spears.

"Back! On the proconsul's command!" Cealwyn wrenched from his finger and held up that ring which Marcellus had lent him, and such was legion discipline that even in this mad hour the *principes* fell back at the command. The centurion impatiently dashed blood from his cheek and stepped through the shattered door, scanned the ring and promptly raised his hand in salute, then hurried out, but paused to shout over his shoulder.

"All prisoners must be taken to the square below the Hexapylon Gate."

Then the invaders swept on.

"I am sorry," Cealwyn said, "but you understand. Your life I can, and will, save, but—"

"I understand," Tiratha nodded. She had returned now to that far end of the room where he had first found her. In one hand she was holding a goblet cunningly formed of gold and mother-of-pearl; in the other that great emerald ring, the stone of which was pushed aside to reveal a little cavity beneath it. "To you, Celvenus!" she cried and raised the goblet on high. "To you, my one love."

IN four mighty leaps he covered the length of the room, but ere he had arrived she had drunk the last of that ruby fluid in the goblet.

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"'Tis good wine." Smiling a tremulous smile, she suddenly seated herself in a chair. "It heals wounds to the soul—"

"What have you done?" he burst out hoarsely. "There was no need. Here," he caught up an alabaster water jar, "drink this quickly." She had already gone pale, he noticed, and her bright lips quivered a little at the corners.

"Too late, Celvenus, my beloved." Very straight she sat in the chair, her eyes simply enormous. "Never would an Iddibal shamble at Marcellus's triumphal chariot wheels!"

"Tiratha! Tiratha!" he cried.

"One last gift I have for you—one you will not spurn like all the rest." She spoke thickly, and it seemed that her lips were weighted with lead. "But first—you must kiss me once—as—as a lover kisses his bride."

How strange it was to hold this lax, fragrant body in his arms and to press a lingering kiss to lips that were growing perceptibly colder.

"It grows dark," she whispered fearfully. "Oh—Oh—hold me tight, Celvenus—tighter yet." Gradually her dark head sagged back until it rested on his arm. "My last—hope is gone. Even you knew—Valeria—you—you would not come to me—"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I lied—Adherbal saw her, but the Roman wench—last—I heard—was unharmed.

"Tanit! How I burn! And— —, Celvenus—love—is strange in its w ys—is—is—it—not?"

Even as he looked, the white, blue-veined lids fluttered wearily downwards, then slid open again, but there was now no light in the sea-green eyes; they were like the darkened windows of a deserted house.

Deeply moved, he laid that limp, jewel-decked form on a divan and raised his sword in salute.

"Hail to thee; ever courageous," he murmured. "Had my courage been as great as yours, we might have fulfilled your dreams—and been rulers in Carthage."

Momentarily numbed to all else, he stood gazing fixedly at that lovely, pallid form only half concealed beneath the amber tunic. How vividly the emeralds glowed in the sable splendor of her hair!

As if to rescue him from his wretched coma, there sounded the furious call of a legionary trumpet in a street outside. Aroused, he became aware of arms clashing loud in the depths of the great palace.

CHAPTER XXXI.

VENGEANCE.

IF Valeria was not in the third tower of the Ortygia citadel where, then, would she most likely be? Perhaps dead, perhaps struggling in the arms of some victory-flushed legionnaire, perhaps trapped in one of those houses now commencing to burn so brightly throughout the doomed city.

Drawn by the sound of that furious fighting, Cealwyn ran down a hall littered with the bodies of men who lay with that peculiar flatness of corpses. Hurdling the body of a eunuch that lay hudd'ed like a small hillock of fat beside a table, he came upon a wide stair leading to the depths of the palace.

There, on peering over a baluster he could see, by the light of three huge brass lamps, the last stand of a large party of Carthaginians.

Ringed around by an almost equal

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number of legionnaires, the swarthy nobles and their followers fought like the brave men they were, and even as the Celt's foot struck the lowest step of the flight, luck seemed to desert the Romans.

Two of them fell suddenly beneath the crashing blows of a Punic captain who wore a Corinthian helmet of copper which hid all his features, save a tuft of his black beard.

"*Pro Roma!*" Cealwyn flung himself into the struggle. Never had he engaged in such furious fighting as that taking place between these veteran troops of Carthage and Marcellus's tough legionnaires. He caught a brief glimpse of Lycursus raging back and forth, panting, bleeding from half a dozen wounds, but swinging his heavy sword with seemingly tireless energy. The Spartan's blazing red crest had been half shorn away and his armor was dented in many places, yet he fought shield to shield in the front rank.

Then, even as Cealwyn slashed at a Syracusan officer in splendid gold-mounted armor, he saw Varro fighting just beyond the terrible Spartan.

"*Pro Roma!*"

At the sight of the Celt's large armored figure leaping towards them, the Carthaginians wavered, but came on again. Beneath the three swaying lamps, the struggle raged towards a climax as, one after another, men of both sides sank beneath the showers of blows which filled the gloomy court with sparks when steel shattered and rasped on steel.

"Oh-h—Artemis!"

From Cealwyn's left rose a fearful cry. Lycursus, simultaneously assailed by two Numidian spearsmen, had momentarily exposed the unarmored space beneath his right armpit, and into this that tall Carthaginian in the Greek helmet had driven his sword point.

As Lycursus's head snapped forward with a violence that sent his helmet's crimson plume swirling out in front, his knees gave way jerkily, but still the Spartan slew one of the Numidians ere he dropped helpless to hands and knees with a scarlet cascade staining his battered armor. Lycursus was wounded! Lycursus, who had given him the first kind word in Carthage—Lycursus, his firm friend, was down!

Raging, Cealwyn slew the second black, then charged at the dark skinned Punic warrior in the Corinthian helmet.

His first slash was dextrously parried, but the blow, glancing upwards, knocked the helmet from his enemy's head.

It was Adherbal—dark, powerful and gorged with battle.

"Hah! 'Tis the barbarian!" he panted.

A hundred infuriating pictures flashed through the Celt's brain, but he said nothing, only stepped back to aim a second blow. In parrying the Suffet's stroke he stepped on a spear shaft, was thrown off balance and reeled back, but succeeded in sidestepping at the same time. *Clang!* He caught Adherbal's hissing cut on his shield. Then with speed of a cat's strike his sword flickered out twice; once his thrust was stopped by the other's breast plate, and the second time that gleaming point barely slipped through the armhole of Adherbal's cuirass. It inflicted only a slight cut, but it did something to the Carthaginian's arm that forced him to lower that trefoil-shaped elephant hide shield he had been so expertly employing. Abruptly the elation faded from Adherbal's face and, roaring like a

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wounded bear, he retreated a step or two.

PASSIONS, savage and primitive as life itself, surged into Cealwyn's heart. In a moment now Creoda's shade might rest in peace! Uttering a ringing shout he sprang forward, but his foot descended in a pool of blood and he lurched heavily sidewise, tripped on a limp, warm body and fell flat. Before he could make a move to recover, the sword of the towering Gaulish mercenary licked across his left shoulder and sent the blood spurting forth.

He knew he was doomed, for above him gleamed the terrible sword of Adherbal. Down it flashed. He braced himself for the sting of the blade—but felt nothing. He looked up—what had happened? Adherbal was swaying backwards, coughing violently and weakly trying to wrench from his neck a short hafted javelin.

Weak, and at the same time strangely strong, came Lycursus's voice.

"Farewell, O Celvenus—my—my friend."

Dazedly, through the legs of struggling combatants, Cealwyn could see the Spartan's body heaved up on his left hand; the other was in the attitude of a man who has just finished a cast.

"Hail to thee, Artemis Orthia!" Lycursus cried, and, with a soft clashing of armor, the mercenary sank forward a brief instant before Adherbal's dark body slipped to the bloodied pavement.

The last Carthaginian was down almost before Cealwyn realized it, and Varro, efficient as ever, was shouting a brief farewell before marching the surviving Romans off to the scene of some other conflict.

Weakened by the Gaul's sword cut and shaken to the depths of his being, Cealwyn rose and, with faltering steps, crossed to Lycursus's body, there in humble acknowledgment to grip those reddened thumbs in a final farewell.

"Peace to your soul," he whispered and was glad that the Spartan lay as he had wished to die, encircled by the bodies of enemies and with a fierce smile on his brutally handsome features.

Valeria—again he could think of her—he'd look through the palace. Perhaps, since Adherbal had lodged here—? With this in mind, he numbly pulled back the bolts on a door to his left. Promptly it flew open and a rush of evil-smelling figures burst through it. They were slaves escaping from the ergastulum.

Terrified, yet delighted at their freedom, they streamed past him, or hesitated, uncertain as to which way to go. The women among them shrieked at the sight of the heaped corpses and writhing wounded that lay in horrible confusion at the foot of that broad stair.

"Losing too much blood," Cealwyn decided when the shirt beneath his cuirass became warm and sticky. "Better look after that cut." Strange, how awkward his fingers were when he tried to knot a scarf about his wounded arm. Yes, it was bleeding fast, a lot faster than he had imagined. Better get out into the light; besides, it was getting very cold in the palace.

Painfully he stooped and, catching up a spear, used it for a walking stick. Yes, he'd better go upstairs and rest a minute; that hurrying crowd of escaping slaves was almost ended.

His helmet presently felt unbearably heavy, so he pulled it from his head and let it fall clanging on the ground.

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Walking stiffly he started for the staircase, but was amazed to find that suddenly it had become steep and tall as the Byrsa itself.

Perhaps that door yonder would lead out into the garden where he could get away from the cloying, musty smell of spilt blood and torn entrails. Staggering a little, he started for that black door only to halt after a step or two.

There, materializing uncertainly amid the semi-gloom, the lovely features of Valeria seemed to waver before his eyes.

"All nonsense; I'm delirious." He weakly waved his right hand to dissipate the phantom. "Be all right when I—I—get—some—fresh air."

He started forward, but the floor began to sway violently, like the deck of the Vesta under way. To steady himself he sank on one knee—ah, that was better—he'd surely be all right, once he got to the open air. But now the floor seemed to tip upwards under his hands. Up! Up! To keep from sliding off he sank flat across the hairy legs of a dead legionnaire.

"Valeria!" he gasped. "Valeria!" Valiantly he tried to rise, but the effort proved too great, and, very suddenly, he sank forward to become another of those tumbled figures which lay scattered about with the three brass lamps picking out dull high lights on their battered armor.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE REWARD.

STILL very weak from the loss of blood which had so nearly cost his life, Cealwyn lay on the litter which had borne him from the Cabirra to the flag galley.

By the warm and kindly afternoon sunlight it seemed that the smoke-blackened walls of Syracuse were not quite so desolate as they had appeared in the early morning. Most of the fires which had smoldered during the past two days had at last been extinguished by the victorious Romans who now patrolled the streets in powerful detachments.

Mechanically the Celt ran his eye over the Roman fleet, now gay with many bright flags and banners. Each ship, as a further symbol of victory, had set a captured helmet atop its mast and just now the galley altars were sending up into the sky soft blue clouds of grateful incense.

By the foot of the leather litter Varro sat, gazing moodily out over the water, much as he had back in Carthage. Years older he looked, and very tired. Significantly, his war cloak was still of a neutral and faded blue and not the martial red of a Roman tribune.

"I wonder why the proconsul summoned me," he remarked to the Celt. "You, I understand, will be well paid for your services. It is only right; without your help the city might well have defied us another year. The proconsul himself admits that— You will be a very rich man, Celvenus—and happy."

Cealwyn raised his head a little and the short, red hair covering it glistened like a copper shield set in the sun.

"I shall ask for a trireme, a little gold, and that is all."

Varro smiled. "You are easily satisfied."

"I said nothing of being satisfied."

"So then your Valeria is lost to you?"

"Doubly. I know now, all her vows to the contrary, she could never be

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happy with a barbarian nor living a barbarian's life. Aye, Numa was right —being born a Celt I can never be a Roman— That is plain, is it not?"

"Terribly so, my poor friend."

"My thanks, Varro. In your own harsh way you have ever been my true friend." He shrugged. "Since we must live on until the Fates cut short our threads—I was thinking that we might depart in this galley I shall ask for, to the kingdom of Egypt. I heard some talk of war betwixt Ptolemy and the Nubians. Now, here's my plan—"

He broke off short, for there arose from the other Roman vessels a joyful outcry. Those Carthaginian ships which had been captured in the harbor of Ortygia were now setting sail for Rome, in their holds the untold wealth of Syracuse, as well as such of the wealthy Carthaginians who had escaped the sack of the city.

ALL at once marines, stationed at intervals along the flag galley's deck, stiffened to rigidity and saluted with their spears when the proconsul appeared, his scarlet and white war cape lazily twisted by the wind. With brief, deliberate motions he was brushing brown incense grains from his hands and at the same time pausing to survey in silent satisfaction that long double line of captured vessels which, shorn of their blue horse head prows, were pulling slowly through the whole Roman fleet.

At last the proconsul turned and, followed by two lictors and four gorgeously armored tribunes, came swinging up to the head of the companion where Varro, a dark and colorless figure in his plain cuirass and crestless helmet, stood waiting his doom with head humbly bent.

"Quintius Varro," began the proconsul in stern tones, "why have you dared to disobey the decree of the Senate and presumed to command Roman troops? When I permitted you to serve with the fleet it was understood that you were not to do more than lend the aide of your fellow mercenaries."

Cealwyn watched the ex-tribune's leathery features quiver at the word "mercenary." He alone knew how it stung the proud ex-Roman.

"I—I have no excuse, O proconsul," Varro faltered, "save that I—I love Rome. What I did in Syracuse seemed to be for her good—"

The proconsul bent his iron gray head to scan a scroll of parchment one of his aides thrust forward.

"Was it indeed you who raised the slaves and mercenaries on the night of Gisco's triumph and burned a part of the Carthaginian Byrsa?"

"With the help of the gods, this barbarian"—all unconsciously Varro used the old term—"and a Spartan now dead, we tried. But we failed our main purpose— Their accursed Zaïmph still exists."

Stonily the four hawk-featured tribunes a Marcellus's back folded their arms and fixedly regarded the man in plain armor.

"You have heard," Marcellus remarked. "What is your opinion, tribunes?"

"This!" The first aide held out his right hand, palm turned upwards. The second, the third and the fourth followed suit.

"So be it. Bring that thing here." Abruptly the proconsul beckoned forward a lictor who carried a wooden box. From it the grizzled old man removed a small object.

"Advance, Quintius Varro; and receive back your knightly ring. We are

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of the opinion that you have more than blotted out your part in the shame of Cannæ."

A gasp of indescribable joy burst from the ex-tribune's lips and tears started from his eyes.

"I—I am not worthy, O most noble Marcellus."

"You have atoned," Marcellus insisted gravely. "I pledge my word that the Senate shall, in due season, restore your rank and citizenship."

The four glittering aides hurried forward to embrace and congratulate the reinstated veteran.

When they had done, Cealwyn painfully raised himself on one elbow and held out his hand.

"I am so glad for you, Varro, and I—I will ever be your debtor. Perhaps some time we shall meet again— Farewell."

"Nay, I'll see you later—" Varro, face quivering a little, turned away, for the proconsul was frowning at this breach of etiquette, and was impatiently fingering his parchment scroll.

"To your ship, Quintius Varro," snapped Marcellus, "and give thanks to Mars."

Only Roman discipline could have sent Varro tramping stiffly off down the runway with that redeeming gold ring gleaming bright on his left hand. But Cealwyn understood.

NOW the proconsul drew near the litter of bull's hide upon which the wounded man lay, and said crisply:

"I have ordered you here because the city," he remarked dryly, "seems to be mine. Now, perhaps, you will state your demands? And—er—I am prepared to be generous."

Cealwyn, gray-faced, struggled up, facing that image-like old man.

"I thank you, but I—I have had reward enough," he said in a calm, passionless tone. "I have seen the might of Carthage laid low. I have seen my enemy lying dead— And what I most would have is not in your power to give me, O most noble Marcellus."

Below his long upper lip the pink tip of Marcellus's tongue appeared and he thoughtfully wetted his pale lips while his sharp gray eyes regarded the wounded Celt.

"Be not too sure, barbarian. The powers of a Roman proconsul are great."

"Can you restore a lost dream?" Cealwyn demanded with a half smile.

The Roman commander made an impatient gesture with his bald head.

"A love affair, I suppose. *Perpol!* all this love nonsense is rubbish. By all the gods of Rome! You, a born soldier—a military genius in the making—talk of love! Your plan for the intaking of Syracuse was most able."

Cealwyn's thin jaw dropped a little. Great Mabon! Could this, the commander of a Roman army, actually be commending, nay praising, a barbarian?

He realized that he should have felt elated, he knew it very well, but still the joy proved a hollow one.

"I thank the noble Marcellus," he murmured. "But since the affair I mentioned is ended, I have decided to take service with King Ptolemy."

The Roman almost snorted, and his gray brows met in a contemptuous frown. "Pah! Why waste time with those soft-handed Greek degenerates? They'll be ours before long—" He hesitated. "And why do you disdain the Roman service?"

"Because," Cealwyn replied slowly and distinctly, "I grow weary of being patronized, of being called 'sav-

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age,' 'barbarian,' even as you did a moment back."

"Your spirit is worthy of a Roman citizen—"

"But I am not one—and that is that."

Marcellus nodded. "And that, I imagine, has to do with this plagued woman. Well, on with our business. Cladius, give me that stylus and you, lictor, hold the tablet."

Into Cealwyn's fingers was thrust a silver stylus.

"Can you write your name?"

"Only that," Cealwyn replied with a flush. "Varro taught me once."

"Sign the tablet."

"But why?"

"Sign it, I say!" thundered the proconsul, and Cealwyn, awed by the old man's ire, obeyed.

THEN, almost before he knew it, the lictor was thrusting upon his left hand a heavy gold ring, and Marcellus was holding out his hand.

"Greetings to Celvenus, naval protribune of Rome."

"Protribune?" Cealwyn's tongue stuck in his throat. "You jest—I—only Roman citizens can hold such a rank—"

Marcellus pointed to the tablet in the lictor's hand. "When you signed that you became a citizen— How did I know of your longing? Numa, the naval tribune, has spoken to me of the whole affair. And Numa was right. Valeria Porsena could far less easily become a barbarian than you, who have a truly Roman spirit, could become a Roman."

The galley seemed to rock as in a grip of a violent storm. What was Marcellus saying? Was he mocking him? Cealwyn sank back and closed his eyes to calm a sudden and overwhelming dizziness.

When, some minutes later, he opened his eyes again the flag galley's well-pumiced stern was deserted save for two figures. One was that of a dark-haired young man who carried his left arm in a sling. It was Numa, straight-backed as ever, smiling a broad smile. And the other?

Cealwyn felt his whole body suddenly go cold and warm by turns. The other was Valeria. Such a Valeria as he had never seen; a Valeria clad in the yellow edged white robes of a noblewoman and with her glorious hair built up in that Roman mode which made the most of the rich curls at her brows.

"May I present to the Lady Valeria one Celvenus, a naval protribune of Rome?" Numa strove to make the question light, yet, at the last moment, he was patently overcome with the gravity of the moment. "I—I wish you both well," he cried, then turned and limped hurriedly off down the companion.

Lovely as that goddess he had once imagined her to be, Valeria darted across the sunlit deck and, as she knelt beside the threadbare litter, there burst from her throat a cry that was half a sob.

"Celvenus! O my beloved Celvenus! How different you look than when I found you last, blood splashed in the Palace of the Treasurer."

"Then—then it was no phantom I saw?" the Celt burst out, his last doubt disappearing like a wisp of fog in the sunlight.

"Not unless it is a phantom you now behold."

And Cealwyn was very sure it was no phantom which pressed soft, warm lips to his.

THE END

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The Men Who Make The Argosy

STOOKIE ALLEN

Creator of "Men of Daring," "Women of Daring"

JUST another college athlete who got out into a world which had no particular demand for athletes. That was yours truly in 1924 on finishing four years of alleged studying at the University of Texas. True, Branch Ricky of the St. Louis Cardinals offered me a tryout as a pitcher, but at that time I was keeping company with a red head in San Antonio whose folks didn't exactly care for ball players. I thought something artistic would please them, so I hurried off to Chicago and studied art for a year.

Got tired of starving and started out to see the country. I saw the South and Southwest from the brake beams for a couple of years, ending up in Borger, Texas, where an oil boom was in progress. I became a roughneck for the Marland Oil Company, worked up to a tool dresser, and then was promoted to be an oil scout with an automobile. Thereupon, the price suddenly fell out of oil and 2,800 of us were fired the same day.

I headed for Jackson, Miss., to play ball. Three days later I had ruined my arm pitching before I was in shape.

The Mississippi obligingly flooded the State of Louisiana, making plenty of work for everybody down in that country. I got a job with the Standard Oil Company on a seismograph crew. Our job was to row around through the flooded swamps and look for gas bubbles coming up through the water. When we found these bubbles a charge of dynamite was set off and the vibrations were caught on an instrument.

This was great sport, but it soon played out. I moved over to Natchez where a huge pipe line was being laid across the river from floats and tugs. This lasted all summer. I was all set to go to Venezuela when I ran across a job drawing animated cartoons for the movies and took it instead. After that I became a United Press sports cartoonist. About three years ago I started doing drawings and articles on the lives of adventurers and heroes. It has been so fascinating that I'll keep on as long as ARGOSY readers "can take it."

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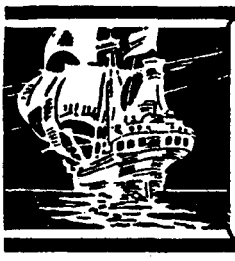

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SILENCERS are much more efficient in fiction than in fact:

Oklahoma City, Okla.

I would like to add my two cents' worth (at least I hope it's worth that much) to the silencer question. You'll find that in "The Last Place" I didn't write "revolver," I wrote "automatic," and being very cagy about it, having had about 7,682 arguments on the subject before this, I didn't even make it an American gun. (Editor's note—Right; it was called a revolver because of an artist's error.)

The only silencer I've ever seen on the American market, American made and intended for American guns, was the type meant for .22's, primarily .22 rifles. I've tried this one out, without being much impressed.

Down on the border several years ago, however, I had opportunity to examine a German 7.65 (.32 caliber, that is) automatic equipped with a silencer, unmarked, but probably also German, or possibly Spanish make.

Not having any spare lives or arms to risk for the cause of science, I didn't shoot this monstrosity, but the guy who owned it, an oil man who had picked it up down Tampico way, assured me it always would fire once and sometimes twice before the back pressure jammed it and that, while the noise wasn't reduced a lot, it was changed considerably, sounding more like a flivver backfiring than a gun going off.

Which was just about what I'd noted on a .22. The silencer, I'd say, didn't cut the noise even half, but it did change the characteristic, sharp crack to a more muffled, confused sound.

At the time it didn't strike me that this was worth all the added disadvantages and risks, the silencer on this automatic being fully six inches long, more than doubling the barrel length and making the gun handle just like a big hunk of gaspipe draped over the muzzle; as well as making practically a single shot weapon out of the automatic. Me, I'd been raised in a country where a pistol was quaintly supposed to be a weepun you could take out of your pants and shoot several times without having to ask the other guy to please wait until you ere ed a tripod to hold up your artillery.

But afterward, seeing a boom oil town John Law go tearing off to investigate, at the crack of a shot, when he'd been paying no attention whatever to the backfiring of flivvers, popping of gas engines and such, I got to thinking about it. There is a distinct difference in the sound. If that shot had sounded like a flivver, the John Law, or probably any other gunwise man, wouldn't have paid any attention, wouldn't even consciously have heard it.

A silencer will jam the average automatic. But it has no business on a revolver—I suppose you could put one on a revolver, but it wouldn't be worth doing.

Silencers, "steel jacketed" bullets and "automatic revolvers" incidentally seem to be the three gun details that give writers all kinds of grief. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred the poor devil mentioning any one of the three will get the razzberry; and usually, I'll admit, technically he deserves it.

Just the same I've heard such men as Bill Tilghman, Buck Garrett, Bud Ballew, assorted Texas Rangers, sheriffs, Border Patrolmen, army officers and other real gun experts talk casually of "steel jackets." They knew better, of course, just as they knew better than to say "ain't." But that was, and still is, the lingo. Saying "metal jacketed" bullet is just as incorrect. What the samhill is the lead if not metal?

Yes and there's even a genuine, bona fide "automatic revolver," too, a darned good gun, as I can testify, because I've handled one. Anybody still thinks there ain't no such animal, why, I might even be persuaded to whisper the name.

FOSTER-HARRIS.

ESCAPE:

Chico, Calif.

Only you and I know how many a sleepless painfilled night we've passed together and watched the dawn come up over the hills. I pause to be thankful for my three best friends—my mother, my dog and my ARGOSY. I sometimes think that the ARGOSY was made for invalids such as I. Through your eyes, I see the great world which must pass me by. With you I adventure with the most adventurous, side by

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side with brave men and lovely ladies, I tour the four corners of the earth and sail the seven seas.

MARY HENNING.

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WILLIAM BARNETT.

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Boston, Mass.

"Jungle Girl" and "The Gold Coffin" were two swell serials. Those fellows, H. Bedford-Jones and George F. Worts, surely can write. Max Brand's "Brother of the Cheyennes" was fair; but not nearly as good as his cowboy stories. "The Devil and the Deep," by your best author, Fred MacIsaac, is starting out like a masterpiece. The novelette, "White Fires," was a pippin.

But say, isn't it about time for a fantastic serial by Kline or Burroughs and a sport novel by McNary?

WALTER KELLEY.

ALL for one—

Chautauqua, N. Y.

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COUSIN BLACK.

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Philadelphia, Pa.

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ARTHUR G. SIMPSON.

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A riderless horse plunges Hashknife and Sleepy, free lances of the rangeland, into swift excitement. A novelette.

By W. C. Tuttle

The Ledger of Life

Semi Dual, Persian prince and astrologer, joins detectives Glace and Bryce in probing a blackmail ring. A serial.

By J. U. Giesy and Junius B. Smith

White Wings

Two tough men go outside the law to fight crooks. A novelette.

By Erle Stanley Gardner

Tooth for Tooth

Shanghaied sailors turn the tables aboard a windjammer.

By Bill Adams

COMING TO YOU IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—JUNE 30

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Your Horoscope

Those who ordered horoscope readings from Miss Carter will find a number of sections explained below. A complete series of readings, including all of your own planetary positions, started in the April 28 ARGOSY, for the benefit of those who missed any of their own sections.

Miss Carter claims no ability to tell fortunes, forecast the future, or solve present problems, and these readings are not intended for any such purpose.

Section 205. Moon.

THIS planetary position adds to your desire to accept responsibility, added duties and obligations. It imparts the qualities of faithfulness, affection and pride. Astrologers consider it a favorable influence which, other testimony in your chart being harmonious, is almost sure to bring financial independence. Unless particularly interested in a question, you are not likely to receive very vivid impressions about it; but if your interest is aroused you can grasp its essentials quickly. It is difficult to dictate to you or convince you against your will. Your actions are apt to be swayed by your emotions. You are fond of freedom to do as you please. This influence added to your initiative, optimism, determination, and capacity for leadership.

Section 241. Mars.

THIS tends to make you courageous, honest, and enterprising. It also has considerable tendency, however, to make you irritable at times. The vibration should give you a taste for the occult which, it is quite likely, you do not outwardly display. Astrologers ancient and modern have considered that it is a testimony pointing strongly toward the probability of a legacy through the father or a superior. The position causes those affected to despise deceit and it is entirely unlikely that there is anything underhanded, sly or treacherous in your nature.

Section 286. Neptune.

THIS vibration would give you power to achieve through your emotions and sympathy rather than in a wholly intellectual sphere. It imparts a sound outlook upon life and much practical ability. It is likely that you are moral, have a spiritual turn of mind, and are inclined to be sociable. This position has some tendency to lessen any psychic qualities and impressionability. In place of those qualities it imparts more materially practical ideas. You are not emotionally credulous in spiritual matters. You are strongly humanitarian. Several of the world's great practical reforms, and revolutions against tyranny and oppression, were engineered or carried out by people who came into the world when this vibration was strong.

Section 234. Venus.

IF a horoscope had been erected by an astrologer of ancient times concerning this position, he would have called this a testimony pointing strongly toward financial profit through public enterprise, superiors, elders or employees. Modern astrology says this planetary influence tends to fit you for positions of responsibility, from which you would be inclined to profit. You are probably just a little apt to be suspicious, demanding that advances be made to you before you commit yourself to anything. Also you are likely to expect quite a lot from other people. You are inclined to be constant, and a lover of home, rather than social functions. You are likely to be easily hurt when those for whom you care do not openly display their affection for you, and you are inclined to be a lover of home, preferring your own fireside to social functions of any kind.

Section 206. Moon.

THE planetary position considered here increases the intellectual abilities. Unlike most planetary positions which stimulate mental activity and impart brilliance, this does not also induce restlessness. Its influence is steadying. You undoubtedly desire to appear well before strangers. You are, by instinct, fond of hygiene. You would desire knowledge, not for its own sake, but in order to put it to use immediately. That perhaps is beneficial; yet it has some tendency to lessen aptitude for cultural development. You are usually ready to face facts, regardless of what they may be. You would analyze and criticize impressions with great care, and it would be hard for you to accept anything which cannot be definitely and absolutely proved true. Your views of life are more material and practical than they would have been without this influence.

Section 240. Mars.

ASTROLOGERS have long considered this position the most favorable for health. While the sun's position is considered important in forming a robust constitution, this vibration imparts great vitality and resistance to disease. It is likely that you are interested in mysticism, hypnotism, or something of a similar nature. Unless other planetary positions imparted opposite qualities, you can profit most readily through mental keenness. Astrologers consider that it is a testimony pointing strongly to extensive travels, and ultimate success. Your general business ability was increased as a result of its influence. A number of great artists were born under this ray and it is considered a fortunate position for ability along that line.

Section 285. Neptune.

THE influence of this planet in this sign would have made you more negative, passive and sympathetic than you would have been without it. The vibration had a tendency to lessen the qualities which make for forceful action, and it is probable that your strongest abilities lie along the lines of working out and developing new ideas. Although it may not be outwardly apparent, you undoubtedly are excessively emotional. It would take very strong influences of an opposite nature to overcome this vibration entirely. Since you are somewhat impressionable, it is probable that your greatest success will come when you are secluded to a great extent, free from disturbing influences, and not subject to the constant strain of contact with others.

Section 207. Moon.

ASTROLOGERS have always associated this sign with balanced judgment. It would add to your courtesy, affability and diplomacy. The one weakness of the position is that it sometimes leads to wavering indecision caused by the fine balance of judgment, but it is never pronounced unless other positions point to the same quality. You have good analytical abilities, and it is an excellent position for scientific vocations. It does little for the practical qualities of business instinct, but rather adds to the individual's appreciation of beauty, intuition, and the tendency to idealize things. It is quite probable that you have an instinctive knowledge of the value of merchandise. Frequently people born when this position was not opposed by other vibrations make extraordinarily capable buyers of merchandise.

Section 281. Uranus.

THIS influence tends toward religious depth. Particularly if other planetary positions in the chart indicate intellectual activity, you will be interested in mysticism. This posi-

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tion is stronger than any other, in that connection. It inclines the individual affected toward association with pyschics, and there is a possibility of some danger to your own spiritual balance in such association. Of course, this is sometimes mitigated by other influences in the chart. This planetary position has always been considered as lessening one's aggressiveness. You are easily imposed upon by the unscrupulous, unless your reading as a whole shows some very practical and forceful characteristics. If you have an interest in mysticism which in any way interferes with the practical things of life, it will be well to subject your interest to the closest scrutiny with a view to learning definitely whether it is worth the energy it takes.

Section 221. Mercury.

ASTROLOGERS consider that this would have added to your generosity and humanitarian qualities. It would have increased any talent otherwise bestowed upon you for medicine, science or literature. It would have caused you to be rather changeable, however, and inclined to pursue several vocations at the same time. You may fail to visualize clearly the objectives you wish to attain and for that reason waste your energy. It has been regarded as a testimony pointing to extensive journeying during your life. There is likelihood that you would have quarrels with relatives. Providing the tendency to scatter your energies and to pursue several vocations at the same time is not allowed to dominate, the vibrations from this planetary position will be of great aid to you in achieving the success which every one desires.

Section 255. Jupiter.

THIS position is considered by astrologers as imparting a tendency to travel, although not in itself strong enough to be conclusive evidence. The majority of people born under this planetary position have lived very happy later years of life. From an astrological standpoint it tends to greatly increase your charitable, compassionate and humanitarian instincts. It should make you more tolerant of the weaknesses of humanity than you would have been. It is a strong position and helps greatly to overcome contrary tendencies. If your chart shows no trait of an opposite nature, then you are exceedingly kind, loving, charitable and forgiving. It is a position which adds greatly to mental balance and it would have made you inclined to weigh matters impartially. Your financial sense would have been improved, although you would be very lenient with others from a financial standpoint. That of course would be greatly affected by other testimonies in your chart, but the influence in that direction could not have been entirely eliminated. Many people, however, who were born under this influence become very strong characters.

Section 265. Saturn.

WHILE this position does not, in itself, indicate special good fortune, it does indicate the fact that you have qualities which would bring you benefits and help you achieve your ambitions mainly because of your own efforts. Other planetary readings may indicate these qualities in greater detail. This planetary position is quite fortunate in some respects. As a result of its influence you are much more determined, ambitious, enterprising and possessed of better judgment than you would have been without it. It has a tendency to cause those coming under its influence to possess powerful intellect and to make them somewhat more intolerant of others' mistakes than they probably would have been under another influence. Undoubtedly the testimony of this position which points to difficulty with inferiors frequently comes about because those who are strongly influenced by this vibration are sometimes harsh and critical in their outward demeanor.

Section 253. Jupiter.

THIS vibration would bestow the qualities of ambition and pride, and also tend to make those born under its influence quite fair and inclined not to judge people harshly. It also has a tendency to make you intuitive. The probabilities are that you are fond of ceremonies of all kinds, particularly when you participate. It suggests that while you are apt to make many extensive journeys during your life they will always be made with a definite purpose rather than for idle pleasure. In addition, it is a very favorable position for the close of life, it indicating astrologically that you probably will become financially independent and in an honorable position during later years. The planet which this sign considers is in a very strong position when it occupies this sign. Its influence tends to make realization of ambition and rewards for effort slower, yet much more certain, according to ancient astrological rules.

Section 243. Mars.

THE influence of the sign considered here, upon the planet which occupied it at the time you came into the world is to lessen the impulsive, aggressive, fiery qualities usually imparted by that planet. As a result of this vibration you are much more inclined to proceed with caution and only after deliberation than you would have been without its effect. You probably come to a more or less definite conclusion quickly, but before taking action you are inclined to weigh the matter with caution. Any tendency imparted by other planetary positions toward quarrelsomeness and domineering traits would have been moderated by this vibration. It is not unusual for those born at a time when this influence was strong, to be regarded as inconsistent. That is because they have the natural quality of seeing both *sides of a question or argument with equal* clearness and they can take either side with facility. Sometimes this quality does actually become wavering indecision, but it may be developed into a fine judicial sense. To that extent it is an unusual influence. The tendency is to make you more just than would otherwise have been the case. Of course, other positions in your chart must be considered. Even though there is considerable tendency toward impulsiveness and hasty action shown, the influence of this planetary position would remove the danger of over-hasty acts.

THE END

NOTE: The complete series of sections ran from April 28 to date. If you missed any issues containing your sections, send 10¢ for each issue desired to the Frank A. Munsey Co., 280 Broadway, N. Y.

NEXT WEEK:

Semi Dual, Persian astrologer, solves a murder mystery, "The Ledger of Life," by J. U. Giesy and Junius B. Smith.

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25	1085	42	632
26	1057	43	607
27	1030	44	583
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